"MERMAIDS"

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"MERMAIDS"

FADE IN:

BIG CLOSE-UP - SWIMMING COACH - OKLAHOMA (1963)

blowing a whistle.

A GROUP OF TEN-YEAR-OLDS

dive into the water and start to race. FOCUS on the smallest swimmer -- who is well in the lead.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
My sister, Kate, learned to swim when most babies were still gnawing the sides of their play-pens. I adore her. Everybody does. The day she was born I wanted to call her Gobnet -- after the virgin beekeeper. But -- Mrs. Flax wasn't too keen.

CUT TO:

BIG CLOSE-UP - MRS. FLAX

putting curlers in her hair.

MRS. FLAX
I worry about you, Charlotte -- I really do!

CUT TO:

CHARLOTTE

mouthing the lyrics of "Dominique" as she watches the "Singing Nun" on a small black-and-white TV set. A wet-haired KATE is sprawled on the sofa beside her, clutching a swimming trophy.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Mrs. Flax doesn't believe in ritual or tradition...

CUT TO:

MRS. FLAX

plucking her eyebrows and drowning Peggy Lee on the RADIO with her own rendition of "Fever."

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - CHARLOTTE

entering her bedroom and adding Kate's latest trophy to a huge collection of others. She turns off the light and kneels in front of a glow-in-the dark Madonna.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
But I'd wanted to repent since the first time I saw a girl with ashes on her forehead cross herself and chant Hail Marys before a spelling bee.

MRS. FLAX

looks through the open door as she walks down the hall. Rolls her eyes. How many times does she have to say this?

MRS. FLAX
Charlotte -- we're Jewish!

Charlotte pouts.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN

Mrs. Flax serving dinner at the kitchen table.

KATE
What is it?

MRS. FLAX
Cheese-Ball Pick-Me-Ups with

CHARLOTTE'S FACE

as she takes her seat.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
A word about Mrs. Flax and food. The word is "hors d'oeuvres." "Fun Finger Foods" was her main source book. And that's all the woman cooked.

ANGLE

Mrs. Flax goes to the window as a car pulls up and the driver HONKS his horn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
It's Fred. How do I look?

CHARLOTTE
Like a woman about to go forth and sin.

MRS. FLAX
Good. That's exactly the look I wanted.

On her way out she playfully cuffs the back of Charlotte's head.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Mrs. Flax was dating her boss...

CUT TO:

MRS. FLAX AND FRED

on a crowded dance floor. The band plays "Blame It On The Bossa Nova." Mrs. Flax sings the lyrics.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
That means we'll be moving soon...

CUT TO:

INT. STUDEBAKER

Mrs. Flax and FRED in the back of his Studebaker. Her [illegible] enthusiasm has just waned [illegible], trying to placate her.

FRED
What's wrong?

MRS. FLAX
What's wrong? Fred -- we've been planning this trip for weeks. Not only are you telling me it's off -- it's off because you're taking another woman!

FRED
Honey -- she's not another woman. She's my wife.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
We've moved eighteen times...

INT. FLAX HOUSE - CHARLOTTE

in her robe passing the bathroom door and reacting to Mrs. Flax angrily humming "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
It gets easy to read the signs.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM

Mrs. Flax stewing in the bath. She punches the water with her fists, then leans over the tub and grabs an atlas from under the sink. Stabs her finger at random onto Grove, Massachusetts.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN

Charlotte and Kate exchanging knowing looks over their breakfast cereals. They watch their mother cheerfully swing her legs on the kitchen counter as she chats on the phone to "information" about realtors in Grove. During a pause she throws a question at Charlotte.

MRS. FLAX
What's that boy's name? Gave you a ride home last week. Tall, skinny kid -- drives a truck?

Charlotte sulks.

EXT. FLAX HOME

BURT Le FOREST -- a tall, skinny kid with a huge Adam's apple, jumping out of his truck and approaching the Flax front door. Mrs. Flax dazzles him with a welcoming smile.

MRS. FLAX
Burt... How very, very kind... Girls -- come and give this nice young man a hand.

CUT TO:

A BLUE BUICK STATION WAGON

tearing down the road with a truck full of furniture in hot pursuit.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I feel I've wasted half my life in cars. I try to be charitable. Taking care of Kate and not killing Mother. But I ask you -- whoever heard of a saint hearing the "Word" at seventy miles an hour on the Interstate.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD SIGN - DAY

"YOU ARE NOW LEAVING OKLAHOMA."

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD SIGN - NIGHT

"WELCOME TO MASSACHUSETTS."

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT - CHARLOTTE AND KATE

sitting on the porch of their new home. The moon is full and a light breeze ripples through the lilacs. They [illegible]

KATE
Why do we have to wait outside.

CHARLOTTE
Mom's thanking Burt.

KATE
Why can't she thank him with us inside?

CHARLOTTE
You know Mom -- she doesn't like thanking people.

Burt lopes onto the porch beaming, oblivious of the lipstick on his cheek. Slaps Charlotte on the back, jumps into his truck and drives away. Mrs. Flax starts humming "The Star-Spangled Banner," and the girls go in.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - CHARLOTTE

exploring the house. Kate washes her rocks in the bathtub. Happy as a clam, Mrs. Flax is hanging her clothes. She owns a lot of polka-dot dresses. Someone has carved RED SOX on one of the doors and Charlotte is staring at it.

INT. CHARLOTTE AND KATE'S ROOM

Charlotte enters the room she shares with Kate and starts unpacking. Kate drags her rocks in on a towel, climbs onto the top bunk and lies down without undressing. Mrs. Flax enters and helps Kate change into a nightgown. She glances with distaste at the cheap vinyl boots that Charlotte is wearing.

MRS. FLAX
Remind me to get you some decent shoes.

CHARLOTTE
I don't want new shoes.

MRS. FLAX
Those are awful.

KATE
(conspiratorial)
She'll never part with them.

MRS. FLAX
Why not?

KATE
They're from him!

MRS. FLAX
Him?

CHARLOTTE
Shut up, Kate.

KATE
Why did Pop send boots for you and not for me?

MRS. FLAX
Oh -- him! What put it into your head that he sent them? I don't recall a card.

KATE
Charlotte says he'll visit soon. Does he know we're here? Will he call? Will he come?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
(shooting a dark look at Charlotte)
The only thing you can rely on about your father is -- he can't be relied on. Now get some sleep. We've been on the road three days.

CHARLOTTE
I can't sleep till I finish unpacking.

MRS. FLAX
(picking clothes off the floor)
Charlotte -- what's the point of us moving if you try and make every place we move to look like the one we just left?

CHARLOTTE
I hate waking up and not knowing where I am.

MRS. FLAX
I'll put a sign above your bed: "We are now in Grove. Have a nice day."

KATE
Oklahoma was nice. I liked living there.

MRS. FLAX
You'll like living here when you get used to it.

CHARLOTTE
By the time we get used to it, we'll move and everything'll change again.

MRS. FLAX
Life is change, Charlotte.
(to herself)
Death is dwelling on the past or staying in one place too long.
(as she leaves)
Ten more minutes and I want you in bed.

Charlotte unpacks another box. She removes a torn photograph. The top half is missing so all that can be seen is a decapitated man wearing a distinctive pair of shoes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I only have one memory of my father... at least... I think it was my father...

FLASHBACK

A five-year-old GIRL looking up at the sky and standing with her back turned to a shadowy male figure. His hands place a pair of cardboard glasses on her face. She is watching an eclipse of the sun. The hands remove the glasses. The child spins round and looks up at him.

HER P.O.V.

We see a shaft of light obscure his face. PAN DOWN and REGISTER the distinctive shoes on his feet.

END OF FLASHBACK

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLOTTE AND KATE'S ROOM

Charlotte pinning the photograph of the same shoes to her bed. She kneels by her bed and starts to pray.

CHARLOTTE
[illegible] -- don't [illegible] me by leaving right away. Please let me stop lying all the time. Please don't let me fall crazy in love so much. Please let someone fall crazy in love back. And please -- please -- send me a sign.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. CAR

Charlotte driving the car through Main Street, Grove. Kate is breakfasting on a Mars Bar in the back seat, surrounded by groceries. Mrs. Flax is reading the ad section of the local paper and circling potential jobs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
Charlotte -- you drive like there's something wrong with your mind. Any slower we could crawl home faster.

CHARLOTTE
I'm still underage. It makes me nervous.

MRS. FLAX
Driving's the most important skill a woman can have. You should be glad I taught you early.
(circling another job)
This looks promising.

CHARLOTTE
What?

MRS. FLAX
Secretary. Couple of lawyers. Why are you signalling? The turn's two miles away. Oh... pull over.

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Mrs. Flax is now behind the wheel as the car SCREECHES to a halt outside their house.

A tall, handsome man (JOE PERETTI) in a thick sweater, corduroy pants and Indian moccasins is standing on the porch. He approaches them.

MRS. FLAX
(getting out of the car)
Hello?

JOE
Ma'am.

MRS. FLAX
(amused)
Ma'am?

JOE
My name's Joe Peretti. Just wondered if you got moved in all right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
We got moved in just fine, thanks.

JOE
I work up the hill so... if you need anything...

MRS. FLAX
And what exactly, Mr. Peretti, is up the hill?

JOE
The convent -- Protectors of the Blessed Souls.

Charlotte crosses herself and leans agains the car.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
This is the sign. Thank you, God. This is a real sign.

MRS. FLAX
Our nearest neighbors are nuns?
(to Charlotte, laughing)
I expect you think that's Divine Providence.
(flirting)
Well -- there is one small thing, Joe.
(taking his arm)
The porch swing. I can't reach. Would you mind putting it up?

he does. She watches. She's entranced. Charlotte watches. She's smitten. Kate yawns. She's bored.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
How old did you say you were?

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN

Mrs. Flax is putting groceries in the refrigerator.

MRS. FLAX
Twenty-nine and cute as a button. Shame you're set on being a nun, Charlotte. You're old enough to have a boyfriend now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
If I'm old enough -- maybe you're too old!

MRS. PLAX
A woman's never too old, Charlotte.

CUT TO:

A GROUP OF NUNS PLAYING HORSESHOES

They stand in a crooked black line, laughing as each throws into the sky and misses. Rusty horseshoes litter the grass. As the game ends, they zigzag across the lawn, scooping up the horseshoes. They drop them into a wooden box, pick up their prayer books and walk away, chanting in Latin.

Charlotte emerges from her hiding place. She walks past the bell tower, the stone chapel, and follows a path into the woods. Hearing the SOUNDS of digging, she moves cautiously towards it.

HER P.O.V. - JOE

kneeling in his vegetable garden, digging up weeds.

BACK TO SCENE

She shuts her eyes.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Dear God. Please don't let me fall in love and want to do disgusting things.

She opens them just as Joe throws the weeds into the woods.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
(continuing)
Dear God. I love the way he throws.

Joe seems preoccupied and angry as he erects a makeshift fence of chicken wire. Suddenly losing patience, Joe flings down his tools and storms towards Charlotte. She throws herself face down on the grass as he passes by.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
(continuing)
I want to run after him, lick his fingers and ask if he's having supernatural revelations.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Charlotte picks herself up and sighs.

CHARLOTTE
Joe -- I'll wait here forever until you return.

She waits for about three seconds, then shoving her hands up her sleeves and assuming an air of ostentatious piety -- starts to walk home.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I will lead a pure life -- free of sin.

Somehow we're not convinced.

JOE (O.S.)
Charlotte!

She spins furtively around. Joe cocks his head and indicates she should join him if she's interested. She is.

JOE
Damn deer are driving me crazy. Can't figure how to keep them off my tomatoes.

CHARLOTTE
(breathlessly keeping pace)
Where are we going?

JOE
Aunt Sammy's place. She lives with the old Calhoun people say she's a witch.

CUT TO:

CHARLOTTE

behind a tree watching Joe bang on the door of a delapidated cottage. It opens to reveal SAMMY, an old but game-looking woman, with long white hair and more lines on her face than a road map. She wears sequinned glasses, a Hawaiian shirt, red stretch pants and matching patent leather shoes.

SAMMY
Deer at your tomatoes, Joe? Human hair. Only thing they're frightened of.
(over her shoulder)
Isn't that right, Dan?

DAN (O.S.)
That'll do it.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOE'S GARDEN - JOE AND CHARLOTTE

examining a burlap square containing a mound of multi-colored hair.

CHARLOTTE
(genuine awe)
Nun's hair!

She appropriates a bright red curl -- as if it's the Holy Grail. Joe starts cramming the rest of it into an old sock.

JOE
They cut it once a month. I wear rubber boots and clean it off the shower house floor. Usually I throw it in the woods for the birds to make nests.

He ties the sock to a stake.

JOE
(continuing)
Well, if the old man is right -- this should save a lot of tomatoes.

This is as close as Charlotte has got to witnessing a miracle.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - OUTSIDE LAW OFFICES - CHARLOTTE & KATE

Reading their [illegible] Main Street
J.C. Forest and Son -- Attorney's at Law. Kate is eating a star-shaped sandwich from her lunch box.

CUT TO:

INT. LAW OFFICES, RECEPTION AREA - MRS. FLAX

furiously typing in the reception area as J.C. jupior emerges from the inner sanctum with DEBORAH, an attractive blonde. Mrs. Flax is not oblivious to Deborah checking her out.

J.C.
Mrs. Flax -- I'm taking my fiancé to lunch. I expect we'll be late back, but I'm sure you can hold the fort. How are those depositions coming?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
(not looking up)
They'll be ready.

J.C.
(taking Deborah's arm)
Deborah?

DEBORAH
What beautiful nails you have, Mrs. Flax. How do you keep them so long hitting those keys all day?

MRS. FLAX
They're stubborn, Miss Gower. Just like me.
(to herself)
Assholes!

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET, OUTSIDE LAW OFFICES - CHARLOTTE & KATE

run to join Mrs. Flax as she leaves the office and sets a brisk pace down the street.

KATE
I want red ones. Bright red ones with a black buckle.

CHARLOTTE
I don't need shoes.

MRS. FLAX
Don't aggravate me, Charlotte. School's on Monday and those boots just won't do.

The DOORBELL CLANGS as they traipse into Landsky's Shoe Store -- CAMERA FOLLOWING. It's clear from the decor -- the owner has a low boredom threshold. Instead of shelves, the shoes are displayed on stands supported by a quirky assortment of mannequin limbs. A wind-up gramophone and some 78's adorn the repair counter, which has Red Sox baseball cards and other memorabilia covering every inch of it. The only other occupants are MOTHER SUPERIOR and a nun who looks too young to order a drink.

CHARLOTTE
(overwhelmed)
Hail Mary -- full of grace.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LOU LANDSKY, a vital and attractive fifty, emerges from the store room holding a pair of black Oxfords. His hair, hands and shoes are splattered with paint. He flashes the newcomers a warm and welcoming smile, looking at Mrs. Flax with keen interest. This look is not lost on either Mrs. Flax or Charlotte.

LANDSKY
Well, hello, ladies. Please, come in, take a seat. I'll be right with you.

Charlotte and her mother sit opposite the nuns. Kate makes a bee-line for the display stand and grabs a pair of red shoes to try on.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
You must be Mrs. Flax. Joseph told us a nice Jewish family were our new neighbors. Welcome to Grove.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Oh, God -- please let Mrs. Flax control herself.

Mrs. Flax nods enigmatically and lights a cigarette. Mother Superior turns her serene beam on Lou as he gently, almost sensually, slides the Oxford onto her extended foot.

LANDSKY
Still a perfect seven, Reverend Mother. You know, most women's feet get bigger.

MRS. FLAX
Only if they marry.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Oh no!

Mother Superior looks perplexed.

MRS. FLAX
Their feet swell!

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
How could she? How could she?

Mother Superior can't quite figure this out. Charlotte is mortified. Lou grins as he ties the new Oxfords and puts the old ones in a box.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
(hoarse whisper)
How could you say that? She's a holy vessel!

MRS. FLAX
(unconcerned)
She's got crumbs on her chest.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(to Kate)
What lovely red shoes, dear.

KATE
Thank you.

LANDSKY
So -- where are you ladies from?

Kate shrugs. Mrs. Flax stubs her cigarette out.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
I'm from South Dakota, myself. Can you imagine trying to keep kosher in South Dakota?

MRS. FLAX
I can't imagine trying to keep kosher anywhere.

Lou is getting the very clear message that orthodox in any sense of the word is not in this woman's vocabulary. Charlotte prays she will become an orphan in the next three seconds. Two hands that wear their shoelaces

LANDKSY
Will that be all, Reverend Mother?

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Thank you, Mr. Landsky.
(looks sadly at young nun)
Only one new addition. Every year -- fewer and fewer of us now.

Lou moves to the front of the store to write up their bill. The nuns stand. Mother Superior nods in farewell to Mrs. Flax.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
Nice to meet you, Mrs. Flax. I do hope you enjoy living in Grove.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Mrs. Flax responds with an indifferent nod. Charlotte has such an earnest and intense expression on her face Mother Superior assumes she wants to ask her something.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
Yes, dear.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I desperately wanted to ask what color her bra was -- and if she had pure thoughts every second of the day but...

Charlotte shrugs.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Well, good-bye, dear.

She pays her bill and Lou escorts them to the door.

MRS. FLAX
(whispers to Charlotte)
He has very strong hands. I like that in a man.

Charlotte rolls her eyes heavenward.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Is there anything she doesn't like!

Charlotte picks up a shoe the young nun tried on and [illegible] holds it to her ear. Shocked at the SOUND [illegible] drops it, then realizes Landsky is playing the gramophone. On his way back he playfully grabs Kate's nose. She giggles.

LANDSKY
Well, little lady, looks like you found a pair that you like. So -- what can I get for your sister?

CHARLOTTE
Thank you very much -- but I don't need shoes.

Lou looks to Mrs. Flax for guidance. She starts to hum the "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

LANDSKY
Nice boots.

CUT TO:

EXT. LANDSKY'S SHOE STORE - THE FLAX FAMILY

leaving the store. Kate is holding a lollipop and carrying her old sneakers in a bag. Charlotte is sulking.

LANDSKY
Maybe I'll see you next week at the Parent/Teachers meeting.

MRS. FLAX
Maybe you will.

LANDSKY
Good. I'd like that.

As they walk away, Charlotte gives her mother a dirty look. Mrs. Flax cuffs the back of her head.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE - CHARLOTTE

sitting on the porch steps reading "Lives of the Saints." An empty school bus pulls up. Mrs. Flax waves to the driver as she gets into her car.

MRS. FLAX
Well -- will you look who's driving the school bus.

Charlotte is astonished that it's Joe and seems flustered as she gathers her belongings.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Why, Charlotte, I do believe you're blushing.

Ignoring her mother's amusement, she clambers aboard and walks to the back of the bus. Laughing, Mrs. Flax starts her car, turns up the RADIO and zooms off in a cloud of dust.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - JOE

looking at Charlotte through his rearview mirror.

JOE
Why don't you sit up here by me?

(CONTINUED)

CHARLOTTE
(startled)
What? Oh!

She does.

JOE
Do you like football?

CHARLOTTE
(lying)
Oh, yes. It's my favorite thing in the whole world.

JOE
I used to play tight-end in high school.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
God give me strength not to sit on his lap.

JOE
I grew up in your house.

CHARLOTTE
You did?

JOE
Guess where I was born.

Charlotte hasn't a clue. She's just thrilled that he was.

JOE
(continuing)

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
God strike me down. That's almost as good as a manger.

Then, aloud:

CHARLOTTE
Did you carve Red Sox on our door?

JOE
(nods)
When my mother died I sat on my bed for two days holding her sweater. Still remembering the smell. Tomato sauce and violets. And something happened to me. Something snapped. I didn't care about anything anymore. Not even the Red Sox.

CONTINUED:

Charlotte is genuinely moved by his story and doesn't know how to respond. He sees her concern and acknowledges it with a reassuring smile. She smiles back.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I'm going to burn in hell, for sure. Here he is talking about his poor dead mother, and I can't stop wishing his hands were unbuttoning my blouse.

The bus makes another stop. MARY O'BRIEN, a small, flat-chested, freckle-faced girl gets on. She ignores Charlotte but her demeanor with Joe is very flirtatious.

MARY
Hi, Joe.

JOE
(not responding)
Mary.

Charlotte glances into the rearview mirror, as Mary vamps her way to her seat.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOL, GIRLS' RESTROOM

Charlotte, fighting shyness, is hiding in one of the bathroom stalls and listening to Mary O'Brien regale a group of GIRLS with tales of her amorous adventures.

Hey, Mary, how was your date with Scott Jones?

MARY
He's an animal.

LENA
Does that mean we had a good time?

MARY
We had oral sex by the old railroad trestle. I love it when they groan, don't you?

KAREN
(not amused)
Mary, you are going to get yourself into a heap of trouble.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARY
(glowing with anticipation)
I know. I can't wait.

Raucous laughter.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM - MR. CRAIN

the History teacher, taking the class register. Led by MRS. CRAIN, Charlotte shuffles into the room and finds an empty seat. Mary scrutinizes her.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAYING FIELD

Forty girls are trying out for the drill team and practicing baton twirling. Charlotte is not very good. Mary is. Coach blows a whistle and everyone heads for the shower. Mary introduces herself to Charlotte.

MARY
Hi, I'm Mary O'Brien.

CHARLOTTE
(thrilled she's been spoken to)
Charlotte Flax.

MARY
Where are you from, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE
Lots of places. Oklahoma was the last.

MARY
Did you have a boyfriend there?

CHARLOTTE
Two. Identical cousins.

Mary is clearly impressed.

MARY
Boys are great. Sex is fantastic. Don't you think?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
Definitely. Best invention ever.

Mary has found a soul mate.

CUT TO:

EXT/INT. BUS

In silence they arrive at her house. A pink Impala is parked in the driveway.

JOE
That's Carrie.

CHARLOTTE
Who's Carrie?

JOE
We went to school together. She's the Avon lady now.

CHARLOTTE
Mother'll be pleased. She loves Avon ladies.

Reluctantly, she gets off the bus.

JOE
Sunday's my day off. I'm going to the shore. If you'd like to come...

CHARLOTTE
Yes. Please. I'd love to.

JOE
Pick you up at dawn then.

Charlotte practically floats into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX HOUSE - ANGLE ON MRS. FLAX

looking like a court jester with only one side of her face made over. CARRIE, who has dyed red hair and wears a pink chiffon scarf round her neck, dabs on finishing touches and shares her secrets with Kate and Charlotte.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIE
Know your colors and know your fabrics. That's what I tell all my little girls.
(to Kate)
Honey -- I would kill to have your hair. Swimming is fine for your figure. But it dries out your skin and can damage your hair. Our hair is our trademark and we've got to protect it.

Kate rubs her chlorine eyes.

KATE
Got anything for sharks and jelly fish?

CARRIE
What, dear?

MRS. FLAX
Kate's planning to swim the English Channel someday. She means body grease.

CARRIE
Oh! Well, honey. I'm not sure I have exactly what you're looking for -- but try this.

She hands her a jar of green paste. Kate rushes to the bathroom with it.

CARRIE
(continuing)
It was meant for crow's feet -- but never really caught on.

Carrie downtools and admires her handiwork on Mrs. Flax's face.

CARRIE
(continuing)
Finished. Why don't you try the other side?

MRS. FLAX
No -- I'm not in the mood. Tell me more about that caretaker boy from the convent.

Charlotte's all ears, but feigns indifference.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIE
Oh -- you mean Joey. Is he handsome or is he handsome? And don't you think he has the best head of hair you've ever seen.

They both laugh.

CARRIE
(continuing)
In high school he was quite the golden boy. No one could touch him on a football field. Then right in the middle of the season of his senior year -- he lost it! Couldn't run to save his life!
(lowering her voice)
His girlfriend had just left town -- kind of sudden. There were two theories. Some said she went up to Canada and had a baby. Some said she went to the city for an abortion. Personally, -- I believe there's a little Joey junior walking around somewhere, though Joey claims she wasn't pregnant at all. Anyway -- whatever happened -- he still has the best legs in New England, and if I wasn't married to a real son-of-a-gun, I'd be after him myself.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Joey, Joey, Joey. Entering a [illegible] girl pregnant. A penitent man. It makes me love you even more.

CARRIE
(to Charlotte)
Honey -- you have very special eyes. And only you and Liz Taylor can get away with those eyebrows.
(holding up a lipstick)
Let's put some color on you.

Charlotte smiles and moves forward, but Mrs. Flax shakes her head.

MRS. FLAX
This one's planning to be a nun.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM

Charlotte walks into her room and slams the door. She presses her ear to the wall and listens.

CARRIE (O.S.)
It's a difficult age.

MRS. FLAX (O.S.)
All Charlotte's ages are difficult! So what about the guy who runs the shoe store? Landsky?

CARRIE (O.S.)
(laughing)
Oh, Lou! Now, he's a real dark horse.

A loud SPLASH from the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - KATE

wearing only a bathing cap, her body covered in bright, green cream, leaping into the tub. She lies underwater, one arm extended, holding a stop-watch. Clicks it on.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX CAR - NIGHT

Driving towards school. Mrs. Flax is singing a duet with Frank Sinatra on the radio.

CHARLOTTE
You never come to Parent/Teacher meetings. What's so special about this one?

MRS. FLAX
You read the invitation -- "Community Begins in the Classroom." Besides, I'm your mother. It's my job to care about your education.

CHARLOTTE
There's so little of it left. What took you so long?

MRS. FLAX
Oh -- here we go. My favorite game. Who's the worst mother in the world? That's tough. Let's guess. Me? Right?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX (cont'd)
Give me a break, Charlotte. I'll make a deal. You stop being a brat for -- what? Couple of hours? I won't knock your religion of choice for a week. Sound fair?

As she pulls into the parking lot, Crain locks his car and walks into the school.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Who's that?

CHARLOTTE
Mr. Crain. My history teacher. He's very nice.

MRS. FLAX
He's an asshole.

CHARLOTTE
You haven't even spoken to him!

MRS. FLAX
I don't need to speak to him. He drives an El Camino!

Checking her reflection in the mirror, Mrs. Flax applies fresh lipstick and pinches her cheeks. As they get out of the car, Charlotte pinches her own cheeks and then Kate does the same.

CUT TO:

INT. CLASSROOM

Lou Landsky's face lights up as the Flax family enters the room. Mr. Crain stands at the door grinning and greeting everyone by name, as if he's running for governor. Parents stand gossiping around desks while their kids pretend they don't have parents. Mrs. Flax makes a bee-line for Landsky. He looks messier than ever. Orange paint in his hair, blue on his shoes.

MRS. FLAX
Well, Mr. Landsky. How nice. How are you?

LANDSKY
Good. And now -- even better.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Landsky holds up a Dixie cup. Mrs. Flax nods in affirmation that she would like some wine. He pours it. Charlotte is sullenly observing them. She spins a globe. Transfixed, Kate watches the world whiz by.

MRS. FLAX
(meaning the kids)
Any of these yours?

LANDSKY
No. Mine are grown and long gone.

MRS. FLAX
And Mrs. Landsky?

LANDSKY
Long gone, too.

MRS. FLAX
So -- you're a widower?

LANDSKY
No -- she's just gone. Up and left one day -- right in the middle of vacuuming. Didn't even switch the damn thing off.

A burst of laughter from Mrs. Flax. Reactions around the room as people watch them become an item.

MRS. FLAX
(composing her face)
I'm sorry.

Don't be. So -- is there a
Mr. Flax?

MRS. FLAX
He also made a sudden and unexpected departure.

LANDSKY
Not while you were vacuuming?

MRS. FLAX
No. When I was in labor with Charlotte.

LANDSKY
Not great timing. You must have been upset.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
I was pissed! Not just that he left, but that he stole my car to leave in.
(fondly)
Buick convertible. Red. Whitewall tires. That was a big deal car in '47. I still miss it.

LANDSKY
It's kind of obvious it meant a lot to you.

MRS. FLAX
First time I got behind the wheel I remember thinking -- Andrea, you're sixteen, you're real pretty, your shiny black hair's so long you can sit on it and you're driving the coolest car on the block. Why aren't you happy? That's how I knew happiness didn't come from material things. I guess that's how I figured it must come from men. Unfortunately, that's when I met my husband.

LANDSKY
Big mistake.

MRS. FLAX
One of many.

LANDSKY
[illegible]

MRS. FLAX
Both. You can't rely on either but I'll be damned if anyone's come up with better options.

LANDSKY
Mrs. Flax -- I don't normally talk to women when the World Series is on. But for you -- I'd make an exception.

MRS. FLAX
That's a compliment, Mr. Landsky?

LANDSKY
Oh, yes. I'd really like to know you a whole lot better. So call me Lou.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
So call me!

LANDSKY
How about Sunday? I'm free all day.

MRS. FLAX
How about breakfast!

LANDSKY
Great. I'll bring bagels.

Landsky beams. Mary O'Brien has been listening to this exchange. She clearly has found her first acceptable adult role model. She goes to impart this information to Charlotte.

MARY
See that woman?

Charlotte follows her gaze to a large, bespectacled, matronly woman standing next to a small, bald, bespectacled man.

MARY
(continuing)
That's my mom. When I grow up I want to be just like yours.

CHARLOTTE
Mary -- you already are!

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX CAR

Mrs. Flax driving the girls home and humming "The Star-Spangled Banner." Kate is wearing her bathing cap with the flaps turned up.

MRS. FLAX
Your Mr. Crain may be an asshole but he sure was right about one thing. Community does begin in the classroom! I hope you girls have plans on Sunday. Your mother's got a date.

CHARLOTTE
And everyone knows.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE
(trying to distract them)
Look -- an owl.

MRS. FLAX
It's not a crime, Charlotte. One day, please God, you'll have one yourself.

KATE
A big white owl.

CHARLOTTE
Actually, I've got one Sunday.

MRS. FLAX
Tea with the nuns?

KATE
Back there. Can you see it?

CHARLOTTE
I hate it when you're sarcastic.

Kate pulls the flaps down on her bathing cap so she can't hear.

MRS. FLAX
Oh, and I just love it when you are. I mean, I get a real thrill every time you do your bitch-on-wheels routine. It makes my day.

She waits for a rejoinder from Charlotte, who refuses to take the bait. Mrs. Flax is disappointed. It's a sport she enjoys.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing; noticing Kate playing deaf)
You can come out now. Spat's over. Your sister won't play.
(to Charlotte)
I hope when you're through with puberty -- you get your sense of humor back.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - CHARLOTTE

in the dawn light of the kitchen preparing food for her trip with Joe.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I'll make real sandwiches. Big ones a man can sink his teeth into and use both hands to hold them.
(glancing at clock)
He's late. Oh, God, please don't let him forget. Be patient, Charlotte. Patient as Saint Bridget, lady in waiting to Queen Blanche of Namur.

Wearing a robe, Mrs. Flax sleepily enters the kitchen and puts the kettle on.

MRS. FLAX
He's late.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I will not start the day with an argument. I will tally up my evil thoughts for the week and ignore her.

MRS. FLAX
When a man's late it's time to clear the deck.

Charlotte puts her knife down lest she plunge it between her mother's shoulder blades. She moves to the window and looks for Joe's car.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)

Mrs. Flax picks up the knife, cuts the crusts off the bread and slices the sandwiches into little triangles. Charlotte turns back from the window and is ready to scream.

CHARLOTTE
No!

MRS. FLAX
What's wrong?

CHARLOTTE
(resigned)
Nothing.

A car pulls up outside. Joe hits the HORN.

MRS. FLAX
(giving her the sandwiches)
Don't do anything I wouldn't.

CONTINUED:

The joke falls flat.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
You're right. Don't do anything I would.

She watches Charlotte run to Joe's car with a mixture of concern, curiosity and envy.

CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S CAR

Joe and Charlotte travelling through the sleepy town in an old Ford. Joe drives with one hand loosely on the wheel. The other searches for a plaid thermos under the seat. He drinks and passes it to Charlotte. She carefully places her lips where his had been. Handing it back, she smiles and (VOICE OVER) quietly sings a few bars of "Ave Maria."

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I want to scream out the window like a maniac -- I'm running away with the caretaker man.

JOE
I disconnected the speedometer. So you won't think I'm driving too fast.

CHARLOTTE
Don't worry. After my mother --

JOE
She's quite a woman.

CHARLOTTE
Yes.
(deadpan)
And a wonderful mom.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX KITCHEN

Landsky is staring incredulously at his breakfast bagel. It has been cut into bite-sized sections that are topped with cream cheese, ham cubes and stuffed olives.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
Gott im Hemmel! My whole life I never saw anyone treat a bagel this way. Where on this earth were you raised?

MRS. FLAX
(unoffended)
Believe it or not -- my folks owned a kosher bakery in Chicago. The night I ran away I stood in the middle of their kitchen smoking a cigarette and eating a ham sandwich. Felt real good.

LANDSKY
Why were you running away?

MRS. FLAX
I had my high school diploma and my first paycheck. Why would I stay?

LANDSKY
I blew my first paycheck on a coon coat and spats.

MRS. FLAX
Polka-dot dress and the highest pair of stilettos I could find.

LANDSKY
I wish I'd met you when I was sixteen.

MRS. FLAX
I was in diapers when you were sixteen.

LANDSKY
I'd have waited.

MRS. FLAX
Sure!

LANDSKY
Where did you meet your husband?

MRS. FLAX
Night school. I was taking a writing class. Those days I thought I had the soul of a poet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
Let me guess. Romantic sonnets about '57 Chevies...

MRS. FLAX
Angry verses about the importance of a passionate life. Nothing rhymed.

LANDSKY
I bet they were something.

MRS. FLAX
Tom thought so. Guess that's why I married him. That and the way his eyebrows met in the middle.

LANDSKY
He was a writer.

MRS. FLAX
No. He worked in his father's jewelry store. Probably still does. Anyway, he said he liked my poems and I fell in love. A week later we moved into a one-room apartment. If you stood on a chair you could see Lake Michigan.

LANDSKY
You must have had some tough times when he left.

MRS. FLAX
(shrugs)
I coped.

LANDSKY
Did he ever come back?

MRS. FLAX
No.

LANDSKY
So he's not Kate's father?

MRS. FLAX
Boy -- you really like to grill a person.

LANDSKY
Sorry. Small town boy. I like poking my nose in other people's lives. Do you mind?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
When I mind, Mr. Landsky, you'll know I mind. It's kind of obvious.

LANDSKY
So -- who was he?

MRS. FLAX
Did you grill your wife like this? Is that why she left?

LANDSKY
I met my wife in kindergarten. By junior high there was nothing I didn't know.

MRS. FLAX
He was a nice young man. I don't recall his name. He came to St. Louis for a swim race. Headed for the Olympics if he won. I was a chambermaid. When I delivered his towels I stayed a little longer than I should have. He lost his race. I lost my job.

LANDSKY
(laughing)
You're quite a woman, Andrea.

MRS. FLAX
I know.

LANDSKY
(ironic)
... memorable breakfast. So -- you want to go out someplace?

MRS. FLAX
Not really.

A condom moment.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEASHORE - CRASHING WAVES

A camera hangs from Joe's neck as he and Charlotte walk along the beach.

CHARLOTTE
Joe, tell me more about the nuns and the convent. Do they wear underwear in the shower?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I don't believe I said that. I don't believe I said that.

Joe doesn't react.

CHARLOTTE
I'm always too embarrassed to take a shower after gym. Mary O'Brien dances around naked screaming about her boyfriend's quivering loins.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Shut up, Charlotte. Shut up.

JOE
You have a great shower in your house. Terrific pressure. When I was a boy I took showers with my father. Always put the light out. Real men, he said, only took showers in the dark.

Charlotte stumbles. Joe grabs her arm.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Please, God. Let him throw me on the ground and make another Joey junior.

JOE
You okay?

Fine, thanks.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I do want to be good. And virtuous. But -- it isn't easy.

CHARLOTTE
Peretti's an Italian name, isn't it?

JOE
My father came here as a young man from Naples. Met and married a woman from his home town and moved to Grove. He opened a hardware store, played the horses, had three pretty daughters and one son. Me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Joe stops and points to a flock of birds.

JOE
(continuing; whispering)
Egrets.

He takes a picture. On the ground they see another bird that is wounded. They kneel and he balances his camera on her shoulder to photograph it. Carlotte closes her eyes in a very secular state of ecstasy.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
You're twice my age. You smell like burning leaves. And your arms feel like Michelangelo made them.

CUT TO:

INT. MRS. FLAX'S BEDROOM

Lou and Mrs. Flax in bed recovering from a serious coital workout. It's a while before either of them can speak.

MRS. FLAX
You're a sexy guy, Lou.

LANDSKY
Sometimes age has it's compensations.

MRS. FLAX

LANDSKY
It's been a while since I felt this good -- don't spoil it.

MRS. FLAX
(lighting a cigarette)
How long have you been alone?

LANDSKY
Too long.

MRS. FLAX
No other women?

LANDSKY
No.

MRS. FLAX
You're lying.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
I am?

MRS. FLAX
Trust me. I know about these things.

LANDSKY
Okay.

MRS. FLAX
Okay what?

LANDSKY
I'm lying.

MRS. FLAX
Why? I don't care.

LANDSKY
That's a shame. Lying's my main thing. I'll miss it.

MRS. FLAX
In my experience...

LANDSKY
Which we've established is -- considerable.

MRS. FLAX
Men lie about everything.

Women don't?

MRS. FLAX
I don't.

LANDSKY
But from me -- you expect it?

MRS. FLAX
Sure.

LANDSKY
Well, when you expect the worst from people -- they usually deliver. Are you always this aggressive after sex?

MRS. FLAX
You call this aggressive?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
You act like I'm going to walk out the door and steal your car. I have my own car.

MRS. FLAX
Packard, right?

LANDSKY
You looked.

MRS. FLAX
I knew before I looked.

LANDSKY
So what does that tell you?

MRS. FLAX
I don't know yet. You're the first person I slept with who owned one.

LANDSKY
They never let you down.

MRS. FLAX
That must be why.

LANDSKY
This is fun. Can we do it again on Friday?

MRS. FLAX

LANDSKY
Monday through Thursday I see other people. I'd dump them but then you'd think I was easy and not respect me any more.

She punches him in the solar region.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Joke. I like to joke. I also like to paint. Will you pose for me?

MRS. FLAX
A shoe salesman wants me to pose for him. Now I've heard everything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
Hey -- selling shoes is my living. Painting's my passion. Do we have a date?

MRS. FLAX
You don't waste time, do you?

LANDSKY
Life's too short. I'm sorry I got so old before I noticed.

MRS. FLAX
I never want to get old.

LANDSKY
Time catches up. What can you do?

MRS. FLAX
Keep moving.

LANDSKY
It tracks you down.

MRS. FLAX
That's when I join Charlotte in a convent!

CUT TO:

EXT. AUNT SAMMY'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

each other to knock on the door. We can identify one of them as Kate because she is wearing a bathing cap. Draped in a long red cloak, Aunt Sammy suddenly materializes and extends a bony hand with a single caramel on it. The children shriek and run away. She cackles.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE - JOE AND CHARLOTTE

driving home. The kids are caught in the glare of his headlights as they swing into the Flax drive.

CHARLOTTE
I had a real good time.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Kiss me, Joe. Please kiss me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE
We'll do it again sometime.

CHARLOTTE
When?

JOE
Soon.

He reaches over and opens the door. Reluctant to leave him, she gets out.

CHARLOTTE
Good night, Joe.

JOE
(starting the car)
Good night.

As she approaches the porch the kids are banging on the door. Mrs. Flax opens it and hands out miniature tubes of toothpaste. The kids stare dumbfounded at them.

CHARLOTTE
Mom!

Mrs. Flax grins, pulls Kate inside and closes the door. The kids move off and Charlotte lets herself in.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - MRS. FLAX

[illegible] of wet feathers as the cat floats up with water.

CHARLOTTE
That was mean.

MRS. FLAX
Sorry. Don't know what came over me. Must be the full moon. How was your date?

Kate leaps into the tub, completely submerging herself, apart from the hand holding a stop-watch. She clicks it on.

CHARLOTTE
We had a good time.

MRS. FLAX
Great -- so did I.
(referring to Kate)
I wish she wouldn't do that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
If Kate decides she wants to break the Guinness Book of Records -- she'll break it.

MRS. FLAX
I can't watch this. If she's not up in ten seconds -- call the paramedics.

She moves to her bedroom, humming "The Star-Spangled Banner."

MRS. FLAX (O.S.)
So -- when are you seeing him again?

CHARLOTTE
I don't know.

MRS. FLAX (O.S.)
Well -- go easy. He's a lot older than you are and he's been around the block.

Mrs. Flax sticks her head around the door.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
I know you're planning a celibate life -- but with half my chromasomes -- that might not be easy!

Before Charlotte can respond, Mrs. Flax disappears, and Kate rises to the surface, gasping for air and checking the stop-watch.

KATE
Yuk! Five seconds off!

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL SWIMMING POOL

One side of it is lined with benches for families from Grove and the other seats fans from the neighboring town. As Mrs. Flax, Landsky and Charlotte find a place to sit, Kate pulls off her clothes and runs, in a turquoise bathing suit, to stand with the competing kids and her Coach -- a woman built like Santa Claus in a red sweat outfit.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Kate's team look like refugees as they shiver and wiggle around in a motley assortment of colors. The opposing team sit in an even line wearing blue and orange sweatshirts. One whistle blow from their coach and off come the shirts revealing identical blue and orange swimsuits. Charlotte sees Joe walk in. She half waves, hoping he'll join them, but he finds another place to sit. She swallows her disappointment. A WHISTLE blows, the race begins and the crowd roars.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT

An irate MOTHER is scolding her child as they walk to the car.

MOTHER
You should have had a faster time. I worked with you on that. Breathe quicker. You have to breathe quicker.

Opening the door of his Packard, Lou beams proudly at Kate, who is clutching an armful of trophies.

LANDSKY
She's a regular Esther Williams.
(to Charlotte and Mrs. Flax)
A red-headed regular Esther Williams.

COACH
Mrs. Flax...
(extending her hand)
Coach Parker. So pleased to meet you. I don't have to tell you how proud we are of Kate and how very pleased we are to have her on our team. With your permission -- I'd like her to have a key to the pool so she can practice as much as she wants. I think Kate has olympic potential -- but I guess that doesn't surprise you.

MRS. FLAX
(taking the key)
Not at all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

COACH
Does she get it from you?

MRS. FLAX
(handing key to Kate)
Not at all. Kate?

KATE
Thanks, Coach.

COACH
Congratulations, dear.

Mrs. Crain's car draws up beside them and she honks her horn. Coach ruffles Kate's hair as she gets into Mrs. Crain's car.

COACH
(continuing; to Kate)
See you in the morning.

Mildly curious, Mrs. Flax observes Mr. Crain unlocking his El Camino with a surly look in his wife's direction.

KATE
Good night, Coach. Good night, Mrs. Crain.

Charlotte kneels on the back seat and scans the parking lot for Joe. She sees him talking to Carrie as her three impeccably groomed daughters pile into her Impala. He doesn't see her.

INT. LANDSKY'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Canvasses are strewn all over the room. Mrs. Flax removes a portrait of Sophia as a Torreador off the only chair and sits down. Lou's style is a mixture of Vargas and Toulouse-Lautrec. All the pictures are of one woman in a variety of seductive poses. As that woman is Sophia -- a short, stout, middle-aged Jewish housewife -- the effect is somewhat incongruous. A long beat, as Mrs. Flax searches for the right words. The search defeats her.

MRS. FLAX
Lou... I don't know what to say.
These are... well... terrible!

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
Hey... I said painting was my passion. I didn't say I was good.
(looking to the girls for confirmation)
Girls -- you gotta back me up here. Did either of you ever once hear me tell your mother I had talent?

They shake their heads.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
See! I rest my case. Now will you stop being a pain in the ass critic and pose for me?

MRS. FLAX
Make me look like this -- you're a dead man!

LANDSKY
Trust me. Already I feel inspired. Go get the wine. I'll show the girls where they're sleeping. Ladies?

They follow him to a bedroom across the hall.

INT. BEDROOM

[illegible] wallpaper with butterflies on the wall. Twin beds. [illegible] a finger to her head and mimes "nutso." Charlotte nods in agreement. They laugh and flop on the beds.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S STUDIO

Lou is slapping paint on a canvas, a brush in one hand, a glass of wine in the other. He is singing at the top of his lungs to Rosemary Clooney's Greatest Hits.

LANDSKY
I did Sophia from memory. Never worked with a live one before. This is fun. Don't you think this is fun?

ANOTHER ANGLE

A stone-faced Mrs. Flax, posing as Cleopatra and clutching a rubber asp, narrows her eyes, hisses and tosses her asp at Lou. It lands in his wine.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Cleo! Baby. That wasn't very regal.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - CHARLOTTE

asleep in the canary yellow room. An intense electrical storm is raging outside. A particularly loud clap of THUNDER and frenzied lightning activity wakes her up. She doesn't know where she is and it scares her. Kate remains comatose. Charlotte leaps out of bed and searches the closet. She finds an old pair of sneakers several sizes too big and slips them on. She shuffles into the hall.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S KITCHEN

Lou, in a red and white striped bathrobe, is forking ice cream out of a carton as he sits at the table with a glass of red wine balanced on his thigh.

LANDSKY
(to Charlotte)
(laughing at her footwear)
Where in heaven did you find those?

CHARLOTTE
A baby-sitter in Alabama once told me, "Wear sneakers and you'll always be grounded if the lightning hits you."

Another loud THUNDERCLAP makes her jump.

LANDSKY
(raises his fist and bellows)
Ah fluch zu Columbus!
(translating)
A curse on Columbus! That's what my mother used to say.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY (cont'd)
(a little drunk)
Know what else she used to say? "Lou, you're like a boarder in the house. A lazy boy. Just like a boarder in the house."
(pointing his fork)
A person needs to grow up to be free. You understand me? Free. That's why I loye your mother. She's not afraid. She's like a wild mustang.

He gives Charlotte the ice cream.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Most fun I had as a kid was watching sandlot ball on the Sabbath. Nothing in the Talmud against that. Just as long as we walked there. Couldn't take a bus. Couldn't hear the radio. I'd a made a great second baseman. Don't let life sit on your dreams, Charlotte.

Another THUNDERCLAP.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Ah fluch zu Columbus!

CHARLOTTE
(leaving at her door)
Good night, Lou.

LANDSKY
Good night, Charlotte.
(as she goes)
Hey, Charlotte. How'd you like to work in my store? After school and Saturdays?

She nods.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Good. Your mother makes me real happy. Did I tell you that?

She nods.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S STUDIO

Mrs. Flax is asleep in Lou's studio bed. She curls like a cat around a pillow, only half covered by the sheet. Charlotte glances at Lou's unfinished painting of her mother, then gently rearranges the bedclothes.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Sometimes I feel like you're the child and I'm the adult. I can't ever imagine being inside you. I can't imagine being anywhere you'd let me hang around for nine straight months.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S BATHROOM

Kate stands on a stool and watches Lou shave. He is dressed in his underwear. He winks and holds up his brush. She nods and he covers her face with shaving cream.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - CHARLOTTE

waking up. She gets out of bed, still with sneakers on her feet.

CUT TO:

as Charlotte passes. Lou is removing the blade from his razor, which he hands to Kate.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S KITCHEN

as Charlotte enters. Mrs. Flax, in her own inimitable fashion, is preparing breakfast and singing Rosemary Clooney's "Come On To My House." She hands Charlotte a serving dish piled with corned beef hash to place on the table.

CHARLOTTE
What's wrong with this picture?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
Compliments of Mrs. Landsky. She seems to have frozen all of Lou's meals for the next decade.

Lou and Kate arrive.

LANDSKY
Good morning. Good morning. And what a good morning. A great morning.
(kisses Mrs. Flax)
How did you sleep, Charlotte? Did you weather the storm?

CHARLOTTE
Fine, thank you.

He sits at the table, expecting them all to join him. Kate fills her plate and lies behind the sofa to eat it. Charlotte fills her plate and sits on the sofa to eat it. Mrs. Flax fills her plate and sits on the kitchen counter to eat it. Lou is left at the kitchen table in splendid isolation. He looks incredulously at each of them.

LANDSKY
This is how you normally eat breakfast together?

They all nod in a "so what's wrong with it" way. Lou chuckles, scratches his head and fills his plate.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

The school bus arrives at Charlotte's house. She runs to board it, looking forward to seeing Joe. She is disappointed to discover the driver is a fat volunteer firewoman.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX HOUSE

Mrs. Flax answering the telephone.

MRS. FLAX
Oh, hello, Mr. Caretaker. No. She's no sicker than she usually is. Okay, I'll tell her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Charlotte looks up from the kitchen table, where she is doing her homework.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Your boyfriend has the flu.

CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S COTTAGE, BEDROOM

Joe is asleep in his dark bedroom under a thick web of blankets. His breathing is thick and heavy. Charlotte sits in a rocking chair, watching him. Lots of pictures in the room of Joe with his parents and sisters. Crossing herself, Charlotte, moves to the edge of the bed, tightly holding her hands together to keep from touching him. He stirs.

JOE
Mom?
(opening his eyes)
Oh, hi, it's you.
(indicating sweater he wears over his pajamas)
This is her sweater. You okay?

Charlotte nods, trying not to react to the feel of his legs on her back.

JOE
I guess I picked this up from the nuns. A lot of them have been sick. I took them food to the dormitory. They looked so sad lined up like little girls -- sneezing and sneezing.

CHARLOTTE
Shall I tuck you in?

He shakes his head and falls asleep again. From across the pond we HEAR the sound of nuns laughing. She studies the pictures of his family. Picks up his parents' wedding picture. Joe stirs.

JOE
My folks were married in November. So were all their friends. They called themselves the November Club.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE (cont'd)
Once a week they'd all sit round the kitchen table playing cards. Dad would hit the back of my head and say, "Joey, some day you're going to grow up, meet a girl and join our November Club."

She puts the picture down and picks up another.

CHARLOTTE
Is this one of your sisters?

JOE
No.

CHARLOTTE
She's awfully pretty.
(as he nods)
Was she your girlfriend?
(as he nods again)
What happened to her?

JOE
She left town. I don't want to talk any more. Okay?

CHARLOTTE
Okay.

He turns his back and dozes off again. She extends her hand as if to touch him -- but doesn't.

CUT TO:

INT. MR. CRAIN'S CLASSROOM - HISTORY CLASS

listening to a Standard School Broadcast. Some are attentive, some catatonic. Some exchange notes or glances, while others absent-mindedly doodle. The broadcast is abruptly interrupted.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
(on radio)
We interrupt this program to report President Kennedy has just been shot in Dallas. I repeat -- The President has been shot. He is said to be moribund.

A weeping Mrs. Crain pops her crew-cut head round the door. Mr. Crain embraces her. The whole class is visibly stunned.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Some of the children spontaneously burst into tears. Others cry because it seems the thing to do. Charlotte's face is the only one that registers no emotion as she unconsciously peels a sticker off her notebook with Kennedy's name on it.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - CHARLOTTE

running down the street, occasionally crossing herself. Everyone has a RADIO on or is staring blankly at screens in TV store windows. A man, head in hands, sits uncontrollably sobbing on his porch steps.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX HOUSE

Mrs. Flax and Kate are huddled on the sofa, tearfully watching the news. Still numb, Charlotte stands in front of the set, changing it from one channel to the next. They all tell the same story.

MRS. FLAX
Charlotte, stop that and sit down. Good God, child. The President's been shot. The whole country's crying. What's wrong with you?

KATE
Mommy -- who is going to take [illegible]

MRS. FLAX
I don't know.

A KNOCK at the door. Moving like a robot, Charlotte answers it. Clutching her plastic cosmetic case, Carrie steps inside the house.

CARRIE
Hi, honey. It's a sad day. A very sad day.

MRS. FLAX
I'm sorry, Carrie -- I don't think it's an appropriate time.

CARRIE
Nonsense. A day like today -- everybody should look their best.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIE (cont'd)
(to Charlotte)
Especially Catholics. You've got the eyes, honey. But, remember, the eyes are just the frosting on the cake.

Carrie sits on the sofa and they all stare at the TV screen. Clips of Kennedy standing on a battleship, playing football, sitting at his desk with a pen in his hand, and holding his daughter on his shoulders. This last image is a haunting one for Charlotte.

CARRIE
(continuing)
Look at his hair. Such beautiful hair.

Hugging herself, Charlotte steps out onto the porch.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS

Charlotte is walking to the Convent.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Oh, God. What were you doing? How could you let this happen?

She passes a nun, thin as a stick and crying into her prayer book.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
(continuing)
I miss my father. I wonder if he's watching television. Maybe he's in the jungles of Brazil and doesn't know what's happened. Maybe he's kissing his Brazilian wife's fingers and his Brazilian children's toes like it was a regular day.

She arrives at the Bell Tower, pinches her cheeks and races up the steep steps.

CUT TO:

INT. BELL TOWER

Joe is hunched on a bench looking blankly out at the dark pond below. He greet Charlotte with a nod and, as soon as she sits by him, starts to sniffle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE
White man's lost his mind. This never would have happened with the tribal councils.

CHARLOTTE
You can see everything from up here.

JOE
That pond water is cold as ice.

Joe stands and pulls the rope, each time stopping the bell with his hands. The SOUND of the death-knell makes Charlotte shiver.

JOE
(continuing)
The old man who did this job before me had Indian ways. He could stand so quiet. Heels together like a little dancer. He used to point his cane across the pond at Mother Superior's cottage and say, "She's keeping a secret."
(as if it pains him)
Most people are.

CHARLOTTE
How about you, Joe? What's your secret?

[illegible] maybe you shouldn't come up here.

Crushed, Charlotte starts to leave. The sound of Joe sobbing makes her return. She circles her arms around his neck. Shivering from cold and fear they cling to each other. Finally, their lips meet and they exchange tentative kisses.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Oh, Lord. Mea culpa, mea culpa.

The kissing becomes increasingly intense. Sunlight streams into the tower and Joe lights up like an angel. Charlotte isn't sure if what's happening is real or a vision. Heavenly MUSIC makes her head swim and a host of religious images flash before her.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
(continuing)
Oh, Lord -- is this real? Is this happening?

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - MOTHER SUPERIOR

across the pond looking up at the Bell Tower and wondering why it is silent.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Joseph! Joseph!

CUT TO:

INT. BELL TOWER

Charlotte breathlessly extricates herself from Joe and bolts down the steps. The tolling of the BELL resumes, as Joe hurls himself back on the ropes.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S SHOE STORE

Landsky is wrapping a CUSTOMER'S shoes and giving her change.

CUSTOMER
(tearfully)
Why would anyone do such a thing?

LANDSKY
The man was a true liberal. I guess the CIA wanted a new man at bat. Know what it makes me want to do? Cry into my goddamn [illegible] gloves.

Charlotte is preparing a pot of coffee, lost in her own thoughts. The Customer leaves and Landsky picks up his newspaper and stares at the headlines. Charlotte brings him coffee.

LANDSKY
One day they're just kids -- throwing sneakers over telephone wires. Before you can snap your fingers -- all they care about are women, countries and killing other men.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX BATHROOM

Charlotte and Kate are taking a bath together. Charlotte is practically scrubbing her skin off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
The whole world's crying about the President. I've turned into a fallen woman overnight and no one can tell. I should be burned at the stake.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM

Charlotte has her hand on the telephone and is willing it to ring. Kate is watching "Doctor Kildare" on television. Mrs. Flax is in the kitchen making a cake.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Please let Joe ring or come round and propose. It's been two days now and I haven't heard from him or heaven.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - A WOODEN CROSS

with a statue of Jesus nailed to it. Charlotte is kneeling in front of it, kissing the feet.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Maybe if I can figure out why I love him the sick feeling will
[illegible] because he has the most beautiful olive skin in captivity. I love him because he wears his moccasins in winter -- even though his feet must feel like blocks of ice.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - LATER - CHARLOTTE

pacing, head bowed, through the convent grounds.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I'm starving myself. I've stopped taking the bus to school. I'm going to purge every sinful thought about Joe Poseidon Peretti from my soul.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Charlotte looks up and seems surprised to find herself standing in front of Joe's cottage. She knocks on the door. He opens it.

CHARLOTTE
Joe.

JOE
Charlotte -- I think maybe we shouldn't see each other for a while.

Charlotte runs.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX KITCHEN - CLOSE ON REFRIGERATOR DOOR

as it opens on a large chocolate cookie and whipped cream cake. PULL BACK, as Charlotte, still shaking, removes a piece and proceeds to devour it. She is startled by Mrs. Flax, who is looking concerned at the demented expression on her daughter's face.

MRS. FLAX
Charlotte! What's wrong? What are you doing?

Uncharacteristically, Charlotte reaches out and clings to her mother in a stiff at-arms-length-way.

(continuing)
What is it?

CHARLOTTE
I...

MRS. FLAX
Where have you been?

CHARLOTTE
I...

MRS. FLAX
What?

CHARLOTTE
I broke my fast.

MRS. FLAX
(exasperated)
Charlotte, if you go near that convent again -- I'm gonna move!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Charlotte pulls away and runs to her room.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Charlotte!

We HEAR door slam.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM - GLOW-IN-THE-DARK MADONNA

being stared at by Charlotte. She blinks. The Madonna looks pregnant. Fearfully, she blinks again. The statue looks normal. Mrs. Flax bursts into the room, carrying another slice of cake and glass of milk. Plonks them down on Charlotte's bedside table.

MRS. FLAX
Eat! No more fasts. You're making me crazy. Are you okay?

Charlotte nods. Mrs. Flax feels her daughter's forehead to see if she is feverish. She is.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Get some rest. I'll talk to you in the morning.

She leaves. Charlotte lies on the bed, putting her hands on her stomach.

CHARLOTTE
Okay, Lord. I've been as bad as I can be. Your move. Save me.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX KITCHEN

Mrs. Flax is serving pigs-in-a-blanket.

MRS. FLAX
(shouting)
Charlotte. Dinner.

LANDSKY
Bumped into Mrs. Crain on the way over. She was leaving Aunt Sammy's house.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
The old witch-woman?

LANDSKY
She's been wanting a baby real bad. Guess she's trying one of old Sammy's love potions.

MRS. FLAX
I wish I had trouble conceiving. I get pregnant hanging my clothes next to a man's suit.

Lou laughs. Kate wonders if it's true. A resounding THUD makes them all look round. Charlotte lies comatose on the kitchen floor.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Charlotte!

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - CHARLOTTE AND MARY O'BRIEN

talking earnestly at recess in the school playground.

MARY
Sure -- she's helped a lot of the girls.

CHARLOTTE
Did you ever...

MARY
Lord, no.
(confidingly)
I never lay down. If you do it standing -- you can't get pregnant.

CHARLOTTE
Are you sure that's true?

MARY
(as if this settles it)
Charlotte -- my mother's had eight children! Whose is it?

CHARLOTTE
I promised never to tell.

MARY
Someone from school?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
No. Much older. He lives in Oklahoma.

MARY
He followed you here?
(as she nods)
Not one of the cousins?
(as she nods)
That's so romantic.

CHARLOTTE
(really getting into it)
He wants to get married -- but I think we should wait -- at least till I finish high school -- don't you?

MARY
Oh boy, Charlotte. This could be the biggest scandal to hit Grove -- since Joe Peretti's girlfriend had to leave town.

Charlotte gulps.

CUT TO:

INT/EXT. SAMMY'S COTTAGE

Aunt Sammy opens her front door and waits for an apprehensive [illegible] she's there.

AUNT SAMMY
Come in, dear. It's one dollar.

She holds out the palm of her hand and Charlotte fills it with change. They enter the house. The carpets, chairs and walls are red. Everywhere curled pictures of babies are hung.

AUNT SAMMY
(continuing)
Now. You want to be pregnant or you don't want to be pregnant? You want to get pregnant or you don't want to get pregnant? Which? It's always one of the four.

CHARLOTTE
Em...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

AUNT SAMMY
(rushing to kitchen)
Oh-oh! Toast is burning.

Charlotte follows. DAN, the old caretaker sits at the table, eating eggs. Aunt Sammy has hoisted herself onto the counter and all but disappeared into a cloud of smoke.

DAN
(explaining Sammy's behavior)
She's opening the vent.

AUNT SAMMY
Have you met Mr. Chapman, dear?

DAN
Hello. How are the nuns doing without me?

Sammy starts buttering black toast.

AUNT SAMMY
Sit down, dear. Have some eggs.

CHARLOTTE
(stammering)
Thank you. But no. I really should be going...

AUNT SAMMY
But, dear, you haven't said...

CHARLOTTE
It was nothing. Really. Nothing at all.
(profusely)
But -- thank you. Thank you.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - CHARLOTTE

running through the snow.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTHER SUPERIOR'S COTTAGE

Mother Superior opens her cottage door. The wind blows crumbs from her large chest.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Why, Charlotte! Hello, dear. Is everything all right? You must be freezing. Come inside.

INT. MOTHER SUPERIOR'S COTTAGE

Charlotte stands dripping by the door. A log fire is burning and she feels dizzy from the heat.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
Take off your boots, dear, and sit over here.

When Charlotte joins her at the kitchen table she notices the surface is covered with biscuit crumbs.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
You look so cold. I expect you'd like some hot chocolate.

A pan of milk is already heating. Mother Superior prepares the drinks and brings a tin of Danish butter cookies from the cupboard.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Okay, Charlotte. Deep breath. Just tell her very simply what happened.

(rustling through paper in cookie tin)
So, child. Tell me -- why are you here?

Charlotte stalls for time by taking one of the cookies.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I'm not sure how to put this. How do you ask a nun if you've been knocked up by the Holy Ghost?

CHARLOTTE
I'm not exactly certain... How long does it take to become a nun?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

An interminable silence. During it, Mother Superior starts drawing lines of crosses in the biscuit crumbs. Charlotte starts to count them.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Two, three, four, five... I'll count to twenty and if she hasn't spoken -- I'm out of here... seven, eight, nine, ten... God -- it's hotter than hell. I wonder if she ever takes off her habit and just sits around in her underwear. Eleven, twelve...

When Mother Superior does start to speak -- it is in a low, almost confessional tone. She keeps her head bowed.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
When I told my brother, who I still miss every second of the day, that I'd decided to become a nun -- he tried to talk me out of it. I was sixteen. Everything was so different then. So terribly strict. I took my vows in a...
(almost coyly)
... beautiful white dress. So excited I couldn't eat all day.
(sadly)
No matter how much I pray I don't miss my brother any less.
Because I think I love him more
You could have loved my brother.
He was a wonderful boy.
Sometimes Joseph reminds me of him.

Charlotte is startled and embarrassed by the reference to Joe.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
The joints of the day -- dawn and dusk. Those are the loneliest -- don't you think?
(long beat)
My brother was killed between the wars. Nobody knows what happened. He was seventeen when he joined. A year later they sent him home in a box.

Charlotte is close to tears.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
They take everything away when you come here. Your name. Your hair. Everything given up to Christ.
(pushes back her chair and stands)
Come, child. I want to show you something.

Charlotte follows her into the bedroom.

INT. MOTHER SUPERIOR'S BEDROOM

Simple and neat. A black blanket covers a narrow bed. A cross on the wall above. Charlotte observes that the bookcase is full of poetry and novels as well as religious works. She becomes agitated when Mother Superior kneels by the bed.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Oh, no. Please don't ask me to join in silent prayer. Or confess to the sin of being a Jew.

She looks relieved when Mother Superior pulls a battered suitcase from under the bed.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
I haven't done this in years.
(unlocking it)
This is what I arrived with -- goodness knows how many years ago. [illegible] your math, Charlotte? Forty-four years?

Charlotte nods. Slowly, Mother Superior unpacks a blue pleated skirt, a white blouse, white gloves and a pair of old-fashioned shoes with difficult buttons. It would appear forty-four years ago Reverend Mother was quite petite.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
You know, Charlotte, even though I truly believed it was my vocation to be with God -- it has never been easy. And living without my brother -- almost unbearable.

Composing herself, she puts away her clothes and leads Charlotte back to the kitchen.

INT. MOTHER SUPERIOR'S KITCHEN

MOTHER SUPERIOR
More hot chocolate.

Mechanically, Charlotte shakes her head.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
I've never told this to anyone. I fell in love once. In my thirties. Over the years I wrote him hundreds of letters. Never mailed, of course. Once a week I built a fire and burnt them. I loved the way he straightened his glasses. Such a handsome man. Dear, dear Mr. Landsky.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Lou and Reverend Mother!

Mother Superior snaps out of her trance and Charlotte gets shakily to her feet.

CHARLOTTE
Thank you for listening to me, Reverend Mother.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Please come back any time. You're always welcome to come and talk if there's anything on your mind.

Charlotte slips into her boots and damp coat.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
(continuing)
How about taking some cookies home for your mother and sister?

CHARLOTTE
(opening the door)
No thanks. They're on diets.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
No hat? No gloves?

CHARLOTTE
(backing out)
Don't need them. Thank you. Em... for everything. Good night.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Good night, Charlotte.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - CHARLOTTE

walking home.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Lou and Reverend Mother! Lou!

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX HOUSE, BATHROOM

Mrs. Flax is sitting in the tub, reading "Peyton Place" and listening to Bing Crosby singing "White Christmas." A KNOCK on the bathroom door.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)
Can I come in?

MRS. FLAX
If you must.

Charlotte enters and lowers the toilet seat and sits down. She draws the shower curtain. Now they look like two people sitting in a confessional.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Well?

STAY on Mrs. Flax listening.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I want to tell you everything I did in the tower with Joe and how I want to do more. I think I'm pregnant with God's baby. But it might not be his. It might be the next Jewish-Italian Messiah. I can't tell. It might have been a vision. Then again -- it might not have happened at all. I'm real confused, Mom, and...

Mrs. Flax pulls back the curtain and glares at Charlotte.

MRS. FLAX
What the hell are you doing? What is it? What do you want?

CHARLOTTE
Nothing.

She takes off her boots and dumps snow in the sink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
Charlotte -- what goes on in that head of yours? I mean -- what's happening when you sit around like that? Not moving. Not speaking. Am I missing something -- or what?

Charlotte picks up her boots and leaves the room. Exasperated, Mrs. Flax sinks back into the tub.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM

Charlotte is pulling the torn picture of her father off the wall. She slumps onto her bed and stares at it. Kate is on the top bunk reading "Fish Are Our Friends."

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
You're the only person who can help. And you're not here. You're never here. Where in hell are you?

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM

Mrs. Flax is cleaning the tub. She HEARS her car start, opens the bathroom window in time to see it screeching out of the driveway.

MRS. FLAX
(shouting)
Charlotte!

CUT TO:

INT. CAR

Charlotte steps on the gas, turns up a jazz station on the RADIO and hits the highway screaming.

CHARLOTTE
(top of her lungs)
A sign, God. Send me a sign.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOLL BOOTH

A bemused attendant shakes his head and hands back to Charlotte the torn photo of her father's shoes.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - CHARLOTTE

rolling down her window, hitting the horn and yelling at every driver she speeds past.

CHARLOTTE
Why don't I hear a goddam voice?
(to the next car)
Here I am!
(next car)
Where are you?
(next car)
Talk to me!

CUT TO:

EXT. JOE'S COTTAGE

Lou Landsky leaving Joe's cottage. He shakes his head at Mrs. Flax, then joins her in the car.

LANDSKY
Hasn't seen her in days. Not even on the school bus.
(starts car)
Has she been acting odd lately?

MRS. FLAX
With Charlotte -- how can you tell? She always acts odd.

LANDSKY
Has she talked to you about anything that might be bothering her?

MRS. FLAX
Lou -- I'm her mother. If something bothers her -- I'm the last person she's going to talk to. She's a teenager, for Christ's sake. I'm amazed she talks at all.

She checks her watch.

LANDSKY
How long?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
Nearly four hours.

LANDSKY
Sometimes no news is good news. An accident we'd know about by now. She's okay, Andrea. I'm sure of it.

MRS. FLAX
Where in hell can she be?

CUT TO:

INT. CAR - CHARLOTTE

singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" as she speeds past a New Jersey road sign. Half-way through the second verse her car skids into a mound of snow. When it refuses to start she interprets this as a sign she should get out.

EXT. CAR

Unsure which house to approach, Charlotte throws a boot into the air. It lands and she heads toward the house it points to.

EXT. FAMILY HOME

Charlotte pounds on the door. Lights go on. A MAN in [illegible] opens the door. That the child standing before him is clearly deranged does not escape him.

CHARLOTTE
(perky)
Excuse me, sir. I was out for a spin and seem to be having engine trouble.

Gently, he touches her shoulder and leads her inside.

INT. FAMILY HOME

His wife descends the stairs.

MAN
Honey, it's all right. It's just a young girl.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
(to his wife)
I'm a shepherd who's lost my flock.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Charlotte -- you're talking like a crazy person.

MAN
Do your folks know where you are?

CHARLOTTE
Sure. They know exactly where I am. Especially my dad. He's that kind of guy.

The couple exchange concerned glances.

INT. FLAX KITCHEN

Mrs. Flax is chain-smoking and making a fresh pot of coffee for Lou.

MRS. FLAX
I appreciate you being here, Lou.

LANDSKY
(hovering over her like Dracula)
Hey -- I'll always be here for you.

Mrs. Flax looks suitably repelled.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Bolt the door and lock the windows. She's looking for an exit. Guess it's a line you're heard before. Right?

MRS. FLAX
From you it's not a line. That's what makes it scary.

LANDSKY
Okay. I won't always be there. Just sometimes. If I feel like it and happen to be in the neighborhood. Is that better?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
She's doing this to make my hair turn white. If she ever comes home -- I'm going to ground her till she goes to college. And we'll move to the West Coast. I've had it with Grove.

LANDSKY
And then you wonder why your daughter runs away when she has a problem. Boy -- is she her mother's child!

MRS. FLAX
Don't lecture me on parenting, Lou. Where are your kids? I don't recall any of them hanging around.

LANDSKY
Low blow.

MRS. FLAX
It's that kind of a day. Christ! Why are we arguing?

LANDSKY
It relieves the tension.

MRS. FLAX
(rationalizing)
Charlotte's fifteen. Her hormones are going [illegible]
down. She'll be as right as she ever was. That was never too right -- but hell -- who's perfect?
(suddenly hysterical)
Goddamit, Lou -- where is she?

CUT TO:

76.

INT. FAMILY HOME, DEN

Charlotte is waking up. A bunch of kids stand over her, giggling, shushing and standing on each other's feet.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY KITCHEN - THE MOTHER

making pancakes and watching her husband, who is outside writing down Charlotte's license plate number.

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY KITCHEN - LATER

Charlotte is eating pancakes with the family. She is fascinated by the father as he kisses his wife and joins them at the table.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
A real life father actually living in the same house as his wife and kids. They're perfect. This is like television.

BOY
What's your name?

CHARLOTTE
Sal.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
How could you lie to them. They're being so nice to you.

CHARLOTTE
My father's probably the son of Rudolph Valentino but he changed his name. Sal Val.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Oh-oh!

CHARLOTTE
My parents love rhymes. We stay up late every night trying to think of new ones and hugging a lot. Me, Mom, Dad, Sis and my

Jaws are dropping like flies.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I wonder if they're buying this.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX BATHROOM

Mrs. Flax is in the shower. She hears the PHONE ring and gropes for a towel.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX LIVING ROOM

Lou is hanging up the phone as Mrs. Flax races in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
She's okay. She's in New Jersey.

MRS. FLAX
New Jersey?

CUT TO:

INT. FAMILY HOME

Charlotte is helping the family decorate their Christmas tree. Still compulsively regaling them with stories about the new life she has invented for herself.

CHARLOTTE
When I was little we lived in Brazil. We owned a diamond mine. My father would dance with me all the time. We'd dance and we'd dance. Right in the middle of the jungle. Me and my sister -- she has beautiful red curls and likes to wear a little diamond crown on her head -- we'd make pear wine, hang the bottles on the tree branches and write on them with diamond dust.

Half-way through this saga the DOORBELL has rung and the father now returns to the living room with two POLICEMEN in tow. The one who speaks has a pie face and braces on his teeth.

Hello, Charlotte. We've come to take you home.

All Charlotte's lights go out. The cold reality of who she is and what she's done sinks in. The family look on -- concerned and awkward.

CUT TO:

EXT. FAMILY HOME - POLICE CAR

with Charlotte sitting sadly in the back seat, drives off -- followed by the station wagon driven by another officer.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Mrs. Flax stands on the porch thanking the Policemen. Without looking at her, Charlotte broodingly enters the house and studies a spot on the living room floor. Needing to keep her hands busy and her temper in check, Mrs. Flax goes to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

Mrs. Flax enters and resumes chopping ingredients for dinner.

MRS. FLAX
Have you the slightest idea what you just put me through? I thought you were kidnapped. I thought you were dead. I thought you were...
(frantically slicing)
... lying by road somewhere...
(hysterical)
... chopped into a million pieces.

She slams down the knife and throws the ingredients into a bowl.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Go to your room. I can't talk to you right now. If I do -- I'll kill you!

Mrs. Flax finds things to bang and slam -- finally finding some comfort in tearing a French loaf apart.

INT. CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM

Lying on her bed, Charlotte looks up as Mrs. Flax enters.

MRS. FLAX
Okay. I've had a small scotch and a ton of Valium. I'm feeling much better. Are you going to tell me what's going on or do you want me to spend the next twenty-five years guessing?
(no response)
Please -- not the silent routine. Where will that get you? What am I saying? It always worked for me. You want to make me crazy?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
I'm sorry.

MRS. FLAX
For what?

CHARLOTTE
Running away.

MRS. FLAX
Why were you running?

Charlotte shrugs.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Running away never solves anything.

Coming from Mrs. Flax -- this almost makes Charlotte smile.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
I don't run away. I'm a grown-up. I move on. Look -- if something's bothering you -- tell me what it is. Let me help. How bad can it be?

CHARLOTTE
I'm real tired, Mom. I just want to sleep.

MRS. FLAX
[illegible] something, Charlotte. Sometimes being the mother really sucks. I mean -- I'm in charge because I'm the biggest and the eldest. But there's no book of instructions. I don't always know what to do. If I can help, you have to tell me. I'll give it my best shot. That's all I can do.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY HOUSE, KITCHEN

Landsky, on the phone to Mrs. Flax, rifles his freezer to select one of the many dishes Sophia froze and left for him before her departure. Puts one in the oven.

LANDSKY
Nothing. She told you nothing?

INT. MRS. FLAX'S BEDROOM

She's in bed studying her atlas. INTERCUT as necessary with Lou.

MRS. FLAX
Not a word.

LANDSKY
What about her school counselor?

MRS. FLAX
Mrs. Crain? Please! That woman couldn't find her ass if she used both hands.

LANDSKY
Has she ever done anything strange before?

MRS. FLAX
She did get sent home from school once -- for licking chalk off a blackboard. Her tongue was yellow for a week.

LANDSKY
Why did she do that?

MRS. FLAX
Some saint she read about had visions after licking a wall. The teacher sent me a note suggesting she might have mental problems.

So what did you do?

MRS. FLAX
We moved.

CUT TO:

INT. CHARLOTTE'S BEDROOM

Kate watches Charlotte rearrange a nativity scene on her bedside table.

KATE
I don't think he liked any of those presents they bought him. Frankenstein and birds! I bet he wanted a dump truck.

Charlotte manages a rueful smile and gives her a hug.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE
(continuing)
Are you going to run away again?

CHARLOTTE
No.

CUT TO:

INT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD BUILDING - CROWDED WAITING ROOM

Zombie-like. Charlotte sits among a cluster of TEENAGE GIRLS and a pregnant woman balancing a screaming baby on her lap. A nervous, greasy teenage boy holds his girlfriend's hand and reads a pamphlet on birth control. Charlotte eavesdrops on a conversation between two of the girls.

TEENAGER #1
If he asks -- just tell the doctor you're a virgin.

TEENAGER #2
I am a virgin!

TEENAGER #1
I know. I know. But don't let him think you'd ever use this stuff.

A young NURSE enters.

NURSE
Joan Ark!

All eyes on Charlotte as she sheepishly leaps to her feet.

CUT TO:

INT. EXAMINATION ROOM

Charlotte lies on her back in a white paper robe. DOCTOR REYNOLDS, fifty and well-fed, walks in and puts on a plastic glove.

DR. REYNOLDS
Hello. I'm Doctor Reynolds.

As he scoops a finger inside her:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
How do you do.

DR. REYNOLDS
And how's school?

CHARLOTTE
(forcing nonchalance)
It's great. I wish we had it on weekends.

DR. REYNOLDS
How old are you, Joan?

CHARLOTTE
What? Oh. Eighteen. Is anything inside me? I mean is everything okay?

He pulls off his glove and looks perplexed.

DR. REYNOLDS
Get dressed, Joan. And come into my office.

CUT TO:

INT. DR. REYNOLD'S OFFICE

An agitated Charlotte tries to focus on a pamphlet with a picture of a smiling pregnant woman on the front. The caption reads: I AM A WOMAN GIVING BIRTH TO MYSELF. She is on the verge of bolting when Reynolds enters and sits

DR. REYNOLDS
Joan -- what made you think you might be pregnant?

CHARLOTTE
Am I?

DR. REYNOLDS
No. You're still a virgin.

CHARLOTTE
I am?

DR. REYNOLDS
You look surprised.

CHARLOTTE
No. Yes. Sort of.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. REYNOLDS
How old's your boyfriend?

CHARLOTTE
Em... I don't have a boyfriend.

DR. REYNOLDS
Then who did you think the father was?

CHARLOTTE
I mean -- I sort of do -- but not really.

DR. REYNOLDS
Joan -- has your mother ever talked to you about sex?

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Please, God -- I want to die.

CHARLOTTE
Oh, yes -- all the time.

DR. REYNOLDS
What about birth control?

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I want to die now. Right now!

CHARLOTTE
Oh, yes -- that, too. She's a wonderful mother. We talk about

DR. REYNOLDS
And you understood what she told you?

CHARLOTTE
All of it.

DR. REYNOLDS
Sure?
(as she nods)
No questions you'd like to ask me?

CHARLOTTE
No -- thank you very much. In fact, I...
(backing to door)
... really should be going. If that would be all right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DR. REYNOLDS
I'm going to give you my card, Joan, and some literature you may find helpful. Read it through and if there's anything you want to discuss -- call me. Okay?

CHARLOTTE
Thank you, doctor. Thank you very much. Bye.

Charlotte would like to find a deep hole and bury herself in it.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANNED PARENTHOOD BUILDING

Charlotte trashes the literature as she leaves and goes to her car.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Wasn't real. None of it was real. I know it's crazy to think one kiss can get you pregnant -- but stranger things have happened. Look at Saint Perpetua. She got transformed into a man. Then fought with the devil and walked on his head.

INT. LANDSKY'S SHOE STORE

Lou is mending Charlotte's boots. A customer is leaving the store and Charlotte is putting shoes back in their boxes.

LANDSKY
(displaying his handiwork)
Best I can do, Charlotte. Maybe I can spruce them up a little with some shoe-dye.

CHARLOTTE
The same color?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
Sure.
(showing her)
See. Perfect match. Now, wearing them days like this -- they're not going to last too long so...

He hands her a box from under the counter. She opens it. Inside are new boots. Charlotte looks hesitant to accept them.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Hannukah present. Humor me.

CHARLOTTE
(putting them on)
Thanks, Lou.

Mrs. Flax enters with Kate, whose eyes go straight to Lou's lollipop jar. He hands her one.

MRS. FLAX
Lou -- I need a favor. I have to go to Boston on some jerk errand for my boss. Could you give the girls dinner?

LANDSKY
I have a great pot roast Sophia left in the freezer. Sound good, Kate?

Anything hot not shaped like a star sounds good to me.

MRS. FLAX
Kate -- your mouth's getting a lot like your sister's. I'm not wild about this.

A look from Lou stops her commenting on Charlotte's new footwear.

LANDSKY
(diverting her)
Did you get the Crain's party invitation?

MRS. FLAX
I hate New Year. What's to celebrate? It's like counting steps to your grave.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
Good -- you got it. I'm going. Will you be there?

MRS. FLAX
It's a goddamn costume party. Where in Grove am I going to find a goddamn costume?

LANDSKY
Look in Boston.

MRS. FLAX
(to Kate)
What do you think?

KATE
Go.

MRS. FLAX
What as?

KATE
A goldfish.

MRS. FLAX
You're a great help.
(to Lou)
Want to walk me to my car?

LANDSKY
Sure.

EXT. LANDSKY'S SHOE STORE - STREET

MRS. FLAX
I don't know how you got Charlotte out of those boots without amputating her feet -- but thanks.

LANDSKY
Are they really from her father?

MRS. FLAX
No. A guy I went out with in Atlanta sent them without a card. I did tell her -- but when Charlotte doesn't want to hear -- she doesn't hear.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S HOUSE, BEDROOM

Lou is slapping paint onto sheets of newspaper. Charlotte is cutting strips of cloth into seaweed shapes. Kate is pasting cut-out fish she's made herself onto Lou's spare bedroom wall, which is now bright blue. They are belting out the lyrics of "Oklahoma" at the top of their lungs. Lou scrunches up one of the dried sheets and glues it to the wall with a bunch of others. They look like rocks.

CUT TO:

EXT. LANDSKY'S HOUSE

Mrs. Flax is carrying a huge box from her car to Landsky's house. All the lights are blazing and she can HEAR them singing from the street.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY HOUSE

The kitchen table is laid for an elaborate dinner. Candles on the table. Bubbling pots on the stove. Mrs. Flax drops her parcel in the kitchen and climbs the stairs to investigate the commotion.

INT. LANDSKY'S SPARE BEDROOM

Mrs. Flax reacts with incredulity to the work in progress.

MRS. FLAX
[illegible]
here?

LANDSKY
(throwing an arm round Kate)
My young friend, Esther, wanted to know what it would feel like to sleep at the bottom of the ocean. Her wish being my command -- hey, presto -- we have wall-to-wall ocean.

MRS. FLAX
You're certifiable. You do know that, don't you?

LANDSKY
(kissing her)
If that's true -- I'm hanging out with the right family!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
You did this in one evening and cooked dinner?

LANDSKY
Charlotte we have to thank for dinner. The child is a culinary genius. A turkey, yet. She cooked a turkey. The daughter of a woman who orders pizza-to-go on Thanksgiving has produced a feast that would put Sophia to shame.

MRS. FLAX
So when do we eat?

LANDSKY
Charlotte?

Charlotte grins and heads for the kitchen. Mrs. Flax follows. Landsky and Kate burst into a fresh rendition of "Oklahoma."

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S KITCHEN

Charlotte is putting the turkey onto a platter. Her mother is putting the vegetables into serving dishes.

MRS. FLAX

CHARLOTTE
Home Economics.

MRS. FLAX
Well, if the way to a man's heart is through his stomach -- there's hope for you yet. Personally, I never found that to be true.

CHARLOTTE
Mom?

MRS. FLAX
What?

CHARLOTTE
What do men care about?

MRS. FLAX
Astroturf.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
Huh?

MRS. FLAX
According to Lou -- it's going to ruin baseball and the whole of Western civilization. So, if you ever want a boyfriend, you better start caring about it, too.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S KITCHEN - LATER

Dinner in progress. The girls are loud and animated. Lou is clearly relishing their company. Mrs. Flax is happy, but there are fleeting indications that their resemblance to a family is somehow unnerving to her.

KATE
A kid in school has an uncle who died and got burned up and sprinkled in their garden.

CHARLOTTE
Saint Margaret of Antioch lived as a shepherdess and was swallowed by a dragon. It burst.

KATE
I want to be sprinkled in the [illegible] whale with an angel guard like Jonah.

MRS. FLAX
Girls.

CHARLOTTE
You might not get a whale with a living room inside it. You might end up in someone's tuna sandwich.

MRS. FLAX
This is your idea of fit dinner conversation?

KATE
(to Lou)
Once a man came to dinner and took off his shirt at the table. Like we were running a nudist colony.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
I remember him. He kept trying to scare you by taking quarters out of your ears. Said he was a magician.

KATE
Why did he take his shirt off?

CHARLOTTE
Guess he didn't want to spill his dinner on it. You kept staring at his hairy chest then you pulled a face, slid out of your high chair and crawled away from the table.

MRS. FLAX
Girls -- sometimes I think I'm not your mother.
(to Lou)
It must be a backlash.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM

Kate and Charlotte have their mattresses pushed together on the floor. It looks like a giant raft lying on the seabed. Lou is putting a disco-type filter on the lamp to create a lapping waves effect.

I love my room, [illegible]
want to sleep anywhere else.

LOU
Fine by me.

MRS. FLAX
(leaning in doorway)
We don't live here, Kate.

KATE
Why can't we?

MRS. FLAX
We have our own house.

KATE
I like Lou's better.
(to Lou)
Why don't you marry Mom and be our Dad?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
We already have one.

KATE
I've never seen him.

CHARLOTTE
One day you will.

KATE
When?

CHARLOTTE
Soon.

KATE
Will he make me an ocean?

CHARLOTTE
Anything you want. He's a wonderful guy.
(pointedly to Lou)
Nobody takes his place.

MRS. FLAX
(ominously quiet)
Charlotte -- stop that. Now.

Kate disappears under the covers.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
[illegible]

Lou gets out of the firing range. Charlotte decides not to provoke a row. She retreats under the covers with Kate.

CHARLOTTE
(muttering; from under covers)
They aren't lies.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY'S BEDROOM

The Egyptian portrait is prominently displayed above the bed. Landsky is getting undressed. Mrs. Flax is removing her make-up. An uneasy silence.

MRS. FLAX
I never said you could do this, Lou. You should have asked me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
Do what?

MRS. FLAX
Let Kate get so attached.

LANDSKY
That's so terrible?

MRS. FLAX
She'll be hurt.

LANDSKY
Not by me.

MRS. FLAX
This isn't your family. You want to get closer to me? Dial direct -- don't do it through my kids.

Picking up his clothes and holding in his rage, Lou heads for the door. Enroute he pushes his face into hers.

LANDSKY
Never in my life have I wanted to hit a woman the way I want to hit you -- right now.
(opening the door)
When you are wrong -- you are so wrong -- it's scary!

HOLD on Mrs. Flax. Whatever she feels -- it's new. She hasn't come up with a label for it yet.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDSKY KITCHEN

Lou is sprawled on the kitchen sofa, nursing a glass of red wine in one hand and the bottle in the other. Mrs. Flax gets a glass from the cupboard and joins him. He fills it.

LANDSKY
You're whole life you never did something for no reason -- except to make someone happy?

MRS. FLAX
What do you want from me?

LANDSKY
A little trust would be nice. And if you care about us -- would it kill you to show it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
People who wear their hearts on their sleeves -- can get their arms chopped off.

LANDSKY
You sound like a fortune cookie from hell!

He makes her laugh at herself. There's a crack in the ice.

MRS. FLAX
Are you planning to spend the rest of the night down here?

LANDSKY
Yep.

MRS. FLAX
Playing hard to get?

LANDSKY
What's to lose? I'm damned if I don't and I'm damned if I do.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Charlotte is on the porch swing watching a rainstorm. Bored and restless, she sings "Old MacDonald Had A Farm" in a slow, [illegible] from the darkness [illegible]

CHARLOTTE
If you're looking for my mother -- she's not here.

JOE
It's you I wanted to talk to.

CHARLOTTE
Oh? Last time we talked -- you said we shouldn't see each other.

JOE
I heard you ran away. I was wondering if you were okay.

A beat. She nods.

JOE
(continuing)
Good. I worried about you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
He worried about me. He worried. Thank you, God.

CHARLOTTE
You must be soaked. Would you like to come inside? I'll make some tea.

He takes off his slicker.

JOE
I always loved this house. But when I'm here -- I really miss my sisters.

Charlotte takes his hand and leads him inside.

INT. HOUSE, LIVING ROOM

The only light is from the fire. Charlotte rests her head on Joe's arm.

JOE
(continuing)
When she was sick my mother used to lie here on the couch. Wouldn't take her shoes off. Thought the devil would steal them.

KATE (O.S.)

Charlotte puts her hand up to Joe's lips.

CHARLOTTE
No one. Go back to sleep.

Joe kisses her hand and caresses her breast. They leap apart when the lights CLICK on revealing Kate in her flannel gown and bathing cap.

KATE
I thought you were a cat burglar.

JOE
No. Just came by to see everyone was okay. Shall I tuck you in?

KATE
No boys allowed.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Charlotte takes Kate's hand.

CHARLOTTE
(to Joe)
I'll be back in a second.

Kate pulls away and runs to Joe.

KATE
Would you like a tour?

She waves her arms about like a tour guide.

KATE
(continuing)
This is the living room...
Follow me.
(hits another light switch)
Here's the master bedroom.

They all stare at Mrs. Flax's mussed up bed. Nylon stockings from an open drawer. Stilettos spill out of the closet. Charlotte glances at Joe. He starts a coughing fit. She turns the light off. A car SKIDS into the driveway. They freeze.

KATE
(continuing)
She's back!

CHARLOTTE
[illegible] your room now.

He's already bolted for the back door. Charlotte rushes to the window.

CHARLOTTE'S P.O.V. - MRS. FLAX

getting out of the car.

BACK TO SCENE

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
Dear Lord -- give me the strength to leave this town before Mrs. Flax does.

CUT TO:

INT. COSTUME SHOP

A MAN in a crocodile suit throws up his hands as Mrs. Flax comes out of a dressing room wearing a gorilla head.

MAN
Fabulous. You look like a million dollars.

She pulls off the head, goes back into the dressing room and emerges seconds later wearing a vampire head. The Man throws up his hands again.

MAN
(continuing)
Great. You look like a million dollars.

She removes the head and glowers at him. He hands her a nun's habit.

MRS. FLAX
You have to be kidding.

CUT TO:

INT. MRS. FLAX'S BEDROOM

Charlotte and Kate laughing on the bed, as Mrs. Flax rummages in her closet.

KATE
What are you?

MRS. FLAX

KATE
Put it on. Put it on.

She squeezes into the costume. It's skin-tight and won't fit over the slip.

MRS. FLAX
Turn around.

They do. She removes the slip and slides into the dress.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Okay.

They look. Kate squeals and claps.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
Do I look like a million dollars or do I look like a million dollars?

Both say she looks great. Playing to her audience, she bends down, crawls into the closet and calmly re-emerges wearing a curly green wig.

CHARLOTTE
Oh, I don't think you need the hair.

MRS. FLAX
(hand on hip)
Of course I need the hair -- I'm a mermaid.

CHARLOTTE
Are you planning to drive in that?

MRS. FLAX
Sure.
(zipping it around ankles)
I can wear it like this.
(falling onto bed)
Or I can keep it open.
(unzips it)
I think it will be a big hit.

I think you'll get arrested.

MRS. FLAX
(applying lipstick)
What are your plans for the evening?

Charlotte shrugs.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
I heard one of the girls in your class is giving a party. Didn't you get invited?

CHARLOTTE
(lying)
Yes. I just don't think I'm in the mood.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
Well -- I think you should go.
(tossing purses
on the bed)
Which one should I bring?

KATE
Mermaids don't carry purses.

MRS. FLAX
(selecting one)
How do I look?

KATE
(touching her
sequinned stomach)
Is that thing waterproof?

MRS. FLAX
I rather doubt it, sweetheart.
So -- don't get any ideas. It
really is a great costume.
(playful)
If I'd had this when you two
were little I'd have worn it
to wash diapers or iron.
(totters to bathroom)
Like this.

The girls grin as she hunches over the tub, circling the air with a sponge.

See -- it adds a little life to
the most dreary of household
chores.

Charlotte mouths "nutso" to Kate. Kate responds with a peal of laughter.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
What's so funny?

KATE
You are.

MRS. FLAX
(into mirror)
God in heaven.

She recoils in mock horror and tumbles into the tub, laughing. This sets Charlotte off. A giggling Kate climbs into her mother's lap and Charlotte follows her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
Must be the mermaid bus.

MRS. FLAX
Charlotte. This is the first time I've seen you laugh in almost a century.

KATE
(hysterical)
A purse. A mermaid with a purse!

They all crack up again.

MRS. FLAX
Well, girls -- according to my mermaid watch -- it's time to get in my mermaid car and hit the mermaid road.

KATE
I'll go get your mermaid coat.

MRS. FLAX
Don't forget my mermaid shoes.

Mrs. Flax slips some pearls around her neck and steps into her shoes as Charlotte holds up her coat.

CHARLOTTE
Can you get to the car in that thing?

MRS. FLAX
Sure. With a little help from my mermaid children.
(to Charlotte)
I'll need your shoulder. And, Kate? Why don't you hang onto my tail.

They totter, giggling through the living room.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Mrs. Flax is behind the wheel of her car. Honks the car horn and waves to the girls. They wave back from the front porch.

THEIR P.O.V. - MRS. FLAX'S TAIL-FIN

sticking out under the car door.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAIN'S LIVING ROOM - PARTY

Landsky and Mrs. Flax dance to Ray Charles "Your Cheating Heart." Lou is dressed as a pirate.

LANDSKY
Gee -- I hope this doesn't end up being "our song!"

She laughs.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Can you eat in that thing without exploding?

MRS. FLAX
I wouldn't bet on it.

LANDSKY
Good. I'll be right back with a big plate of food.

He heads for the kitchen. She eases onto the sofa and picks up her drink. Dressed as Little Bo Peep, Carrie pushes through the throng and sits on the arm of the sofa, admiring the green wig.

CARRIE
Don't you think you stayed under the dryer just a little too long?

MRS. FLAX
Carrie, you look beautiful.

We both look beautiful. We are so lucky. Every day we get to gaze in the mirror and thank God for high cheekbones. How's Charlotte doing?

MRS. FLAX
Only Charlotte knows and she's not saying. You've got a whole bunch of girls, Carrie. What do you tell them?

CARRIE
That virginity's their trump card -- so hang onto it.

MRS. FLAX
That's what my mother told me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIE
And did you listen?

MRS. FLAX
Hell, no.

CARRIE
Me neither.

Lou returns with two plates, hands one to Mrs. Flax and kisses Carrie on the cheek.

LANDSKY
Where's that handsome hunk of a husband of yours?

CARRIE
Out back with the rest of the boys talking baseball. He just bet twenty bucks they couldn't name three players made more than 300 hits.

Lou puts down his plate and leaps to his feet.

LANDSKY
Hey, Buzz!
(to Mrs. Flax)
Be right back.
(shouting over the music)
Ty Cobb... Cap Anson...

I must have been the only cheerleader didn't know a line drive from a catcher's mitt.

Mrs. Flax notices Coach and Mrs. Crain, in pilgrim costumes, are dancing to Patsy Cline's "She's Got You."

MRS. FLAX
Last time I saw women dancing together was in junior high.

CARRIE
I do hear tell Mrs. Crain has had her own refrigerator shelf in Coach's house for nearly a year.

Mr. Crain, dressed as Abe Lincoln, is watching his wife. He has a vein in his temple. It appears to be throbbing.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Charlotte and Kate are shivering on the porch swing.

KATE
Last day ever, ever of this year.

CHARLOTTE
Shall we make some resolutions?

KATE
What's resolutions?

CHARLOTTE
Wishes.

KATE
I wish I could swim forever.

CHARLOTTE
I wish I'd known Anne Frank.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
And I didn't lust after Joe so much.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAIN'S LIVING ROOM

Joe is making a late entrance to the party. He is not wearing a costume. Carrie, dancing with her husband, gives him an affectionate greeting.

Hi, handsome. You're a late arrival. Great caretaker costume.

He pushes shyly to the bar, where Mrs. Flax is putting fresh ice in her drink.

MRS. FLAX
No date, Joe?

He smiles and shakes his head.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
I'm surprised.

JOE
You look very nice, Mrs. Flax.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
I can't quite figure you, Mr. Peretti.

Lou joins them.

LANDSKY
Mrs. Flax, I think it's time we had another dance.

He leads her onto the floor.

MRS. FLAX
Did you win the twenty bucks?

LANDSKY
Of course I won. I've promised myself a trip to Florida this year to watch Spring Training. Come with me.

MRS. FLAX
Ask me in three months.

LANDSKY
You mean if you're still here?

She doesn't respond.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
What would you say if I asked you to marry me?

MRS. FLAX
I'd remind you we're both still married. And then I'd write -- probably from California.

LANDSKY
Live with me.

MRS. FLAX
No.

She pulls away and walks onto the porch.

EXT. PORCH

Mrs. Flax lights a cigarette. Landsky follows and watches her for a while before speaking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSKY
Know what I think?

She doesn't look curious.

LANDSKY
(continuing)
Ten years from now -- when the kids are gone and you've run out of states to hide from yourself in -- you're gonna think about me, and you're gonna miss me, and you're gonna sit up nights wondering about us.

MRS. FLAX
Oh, yeah?

LANDSKY
You're so damned scared someone'll leave you, and so damned determined to get out first, how the hell can any guy get a fair shake with you?

The lights go out. Everyone starts screaming, "Happy New Year." Neither makes a move until the noise dies down.

MRS. FLAX
Well -- so far 1964's a real bummer. Are you planning to come home with me?

(kissing her on the cheek)
Another night.

They exchange rueful smiles and he walks inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. CRAIN'S HOUSE

Mrs. Flax is trying to start her car. She fails. Rolls down her window when she sees Joe leaving the party.

MRS. FLAX
Mr. Peretti? I wonder if you could help me.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Charlotte is asleep on the porch swing. She wakes up and shades her eyes from the glare of Joe's headlights. The lights go off, but the motor is running.

CHARLOTTE
Mom?
(silence)
Mom?

CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S CAR

Mrs. Flax looks amused. Joe is nervous.

MRS. FLAX
Thanks for the ride, Joe.

JOE
No problem.

He waits for her to get out. She doesn't. He switches the ignition off, gets out of the car.

EXT. FLAX HOUSE - AT JOE'S CAR

Joe opens Mrs. Flax's door. She clutches his arm to pull herself up.

MRS. FLAX

JOE
Happy New Year.

She waits for him to kiss her. He doesn't. She kisses him.

REACTION SHOT - CHARLOTTE

shocked.

BACK TO SCENE

MRS. FLAX
I believe you're blushing, Joe.
(gently teasing)
And you a ladies' man!

Her laugh echoes across the yard.

ANOTHER ANGLE

as Charlotte tears down the steps in a blind fury.

CHARLOTTE
You kissed him. I don't believe you did that.
(lashing out at Joe)
Why did you let her kiss you?

MRS. FLAX
Charlotte -- stop that! Good God -- it was just a New Year's kiss.

CHARLOTTE
You don't believe in New Year.
(pounding on Joe's chest)
Why did you let her? She kisses everyone. Don't you know that? It doesn't mean you're special. She doesn't like you. She doesn't like anybody.

Mrs. Flax drags her away from Joe, who backs into his car.

MRS. FLAX
Stop it. Stop it. Pull yourself together. What the hell is this?

Joe is reversing the car back up the driveway. A sleepy Kate switches the porch light on.

KATE

MRS. FLAX
Nothing.

CHARLOTTE
Everything.

Mrs. Flax loosens her grip on Charlotte, strides over to Kate and leads her inside.

MRS. FLAX
Kate -- come into the house before you freeze.

KATE
What's wrong with Charlotte. Is she running away?

MRS. FLAX
No.

CONTINUED:

KATE
Did you have a nice time?

MRS. FLAX
Yes. I had a wonderful time.
(glaring at Charlotte)
Do you intend to stay out here forever?

Charlotte glares right back. Mrs. Flax goes inside. Joe's car stalls. Charlotte races after him. She throws herself into the passenger seat.

INT. JOE'S CAR

CHARLOTTE
(breathless)
You should have stopped her. It isn't fair. What about us? Don't you know I love you?

Joe starts to cry. It's hard for him to speak. Even harder to look at her.

JOE
She was a cheerleader.

CHARLOTTE
Who?

JOE
[illegible]

CHARLOTTE
Why are we talking about her?

JOE
Charlotte -- don't make this harder. One night -- it was raining. We borrowed my father's car. Drove into the hills. For a few seconds I turned off the lights and hit the gas. I guess to scare her. It was like swimming in a lake. She screamed at me to stop and grabbed my hand. I parked the car at an overlook. We were both excited. She said she'd get undressed if I did it first.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
Joe -- I really have no interest in hearing this.

JOE
(angry)
Damn it! Would you let me talk. I have never told this to anyone. I need to talk.

Charlotte is stunned into silence.

JOE
(continuing)
Slowly I pulled off my clothes. Threw them in the back seat. And sat there -- naked. She turned on the inside light. And then she laughed.

CHARLOTTE
Yes?

JOE
(ready to strangle her)
What do you mean -- yes?

CHARLOTTE
What about the baby?

JOE
Don't you get it? Nothing later -- she moved. In the middle of senior year. The town kept talking. Talking and talking. Making me into some kind of Don Juan. My friends started leaving for college or the army. I spent all my evenings at an old movie theater in the next town. There was a bar next door -- the Dream Castle. One night I went with a woman who kept a room upstairs. It didn't work out well. I need to get out of this place. I used to be alive. I had a future.

A long beat.

CHARLOTTE
Joe. Take me home with you. Let me spend the night.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

He doesn't respond. He starts the car. It works. He leans across and opens the passenger door. Stunned, Charlotte gets out.

EXT. FLAX HOUSE - FRONT PORCH

As Charlotte reaches the porch, Mrs. Flax emerges in her robe.

MRS. FLAX
He's too old for you.

CHARLOTTE
Then he's too young for you.

MRS. FLAX
Never too young, Charlotte.

They glare at each other. This isn't a mother and daughter. This is two women sizing each other up and evaluating the competition.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET

Kate is sobbing down Main Street with two bathing suits hanging from her wrists. She bursts into Landsky's shoe store.

INT. LANDSKY'S SHOE ...ING

Lou drops the shoes he is repairing and scoops Kate up. She is too upset to speak.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Lou is leading a still distressed Kate by the hand up the steps of the Flax porch.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX KITCHEN

Mrs. Flax is washing dishes at the sink. She takes off her rubber gloves as Lou and Kate enter. Charlotte looks up from her homework. Kate rushes to her mother, who attempts to console her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE
Coach is gone.

MRS. FLAX
What do you mean -- coach is gone?

KATE
She ran away with Mrs. Crain.
They kiss each other on the lips.

MRS. FLAX
Who told you that?

KATE
And now I don't have a coach and
they don't think they'll get
another this year.

MRS. FLAX
(to Lou)
Is it true?

LANDSKY
Bob Crain was crying for the first
time since Birdie Tebbetts got
traded to the Cleveland Indians.

MRS. FLAX
Carrie did hint that they were
more than friends.

LANDSKY
Coach called [illegible]
on the highway. Told him he'd
never be a politician, or amount
to anything and that he was a
lousy teacher.

MRS. FLAX
I would have thought things were
bad enough without throwing that
in!

LANDSKY
Then she called him a housemate
and he got so angry he pulled
the phone out of the wall.

KATE
Do they really kiss on the lips?

MRS. FLAX
I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE
Do you think she'll write to me?

MRS. FLAX
Maybe.

KATE
No she won't!

She runs to the bathroom and slams the door.

MRS. FLAX
Charlotte -- go see if she's okay.
(to Lou)
I live in a madhouse. I'm going to have a little drink. How about you?

Laughing, Lou nods.

MRS. FLAX
(pouring scotch)
You've been quite the stranger.

LANDSKY
Missed me, huh?

MRS. FLAX
I survived.

LANDSKY
Could you survive a movie? Maybe dinner and a movie?

MRS. FLAX
I think I could handle that.

LANDSKY
Good. Pick you up at seven.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM

Kate sits sullenly in the tub splashing her hands. Her eyes are still red from crying and the bathing suits are still attached to her wrists. Charlotte sits with her feet on the bath, trying to cheer her up.

CHARLOTTE
Kate -- would you like me to tell you a secret? Something I haven't told anyone?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE
(petulant)
What?

CHARLOTTE
I'm in love.

KATE
Who with?

CHARLOTTE
Joe Peretti.

KATE
Do you kiss him?

CHARLOTTE
Yes.

KATE
Like Coach and Mrs. Crain?

CHARLOTTE
Not exactly...

KATE
What's it like?

CHARLOTTE
Sometimes you kiss someone and nothing happens. It's like kissing your own hand or
when [illegible] someone you love...

KATE
I know -- there's chemicals.

CHARLOTTE
Where'd you hear that?

KATE
Is it true?

CHARLOTTE
Yes. There's chemicals. And that's how it is with me and Joe.

KATE
And Mom and Pop?

CHARLOTTE
Once -- I guess.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE
And Mom and Lou?

CHARLOTTE
I think for Lou. You can never tell with Mom.

KATE
And Coach and Mrs. Crain? But not Mrs. Crain and Mr. Crain.

CHARLOTTE
Right.

Mrs. Flax KNOCKS.

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
Don't tell Mom.

CUT TO:

INT. MRS. FLAX'S BEDROOM

She is making Kate laugh by singing verses from her favorite song. Kate is wrapped in a towel, snuggling up in her mother's bed.

MRS. FLAX
(singing)
"Roll all your troubles in a
[illegible]
And polka, polka, polka
Your blues away."

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM

Charlotte stares at her reflection in the bathroom mirror. Tries her hair up. Tries it down. Hates both.

CUT TO:

INT. MRS. FLAX'S BEDROOM

Charlotte is selecting one of her mother's polka dot dresses. She holds it against herself and studies the effect in the mirror. Kate can be heard in the b.g. tossing her rock collection in the bath.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
(whisper)
Care to dance, Mrs. Flax. Mrs. Polka Flax.

KATE
(poking her head round the door)
If you try one of her dresses on -- she'll kill you.

CHARLOTTE
Go back to your rocks, Kate.

She does. Charlotte slips the dress on. Hands on hips, she spins in front of the mirror. She takes a pair of stockings out of the drawer and mock seductively slides them on. She practices strutting across the room in a high pair of stilettos.

KATE (O.S.)
(from bathroom)
You tap dancing?

CHARLOTTE
I'm a woman.

KATE
(watching)
She's going to kill you. She really is.

CHARLOTTE
(imitating Carrie)
Know your colors and know your fabrics. That's what I tell my little girls.

Kate giggles as she pinches her cheek. Charlotte selects a bright pink lipstick and applies it. Adds a little mascara. Eyeshadow. Powder. Pinches her cheeks. Beams at Kate.

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
Let's celebrate.

KATE
You look like someone drew all over you.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN

Charlotte is humming "We Three Kings of Orient Are" as she unloads from the refrigerator -- jars of mushrooms, pickles, onions, olives, strawberry jam, some cream cheese and a bottle of wine. Grabs a loaf and prepares huge sandwiches. Kate sucks on an olive and spits.

CHARLOTTE
What are you doing?

KATE
Sucking out the pimentos. They give me hernias.

CHARLOTTE
You mean hives, Fish-head!
(imitating Mrs. Flax as she pours wine)
I'm going to have a drink now, girls. I'm going to have a little drink.

KATE
(sips wine, spits)
Yuk! It's disgusting.

CHARLOTTE
My dear, let me freshen that for you.
(holding up her glass)
On your mark, get set -- go!

KATE
Hit me again, Sergeant.

Charlotte refills both glasses. They drink.

CHARLOTTE
After you swim the Channel -- they give you champagne. Did you know that, Fish-head?

KATE
Yes, I did, Sergeant.
(accepting sandwich, admiring the tray)
What lovely blue fruit.

CHARLOTTE
Why thank you, my dear. I painted them myself.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE - CHARLOTTE AND KATE

in a drunken stupor on the porch. Kate is holding her stomach and lying with her head on Charlotte's lap.

KATE
Tell me about when I was born.

CHARLOTTE
You were born in a hospital in Minneapolis on a cold winter day. When Mrs. Flax brought you home I pretended you were mine. Tried to make you call me mom. I tickled your ears as you lay in your basinette and christened you -- Holy Innocent. Only thing she and I ever agreed on was that you were a wonderful child.

KATE
Where was Pop?

CHARLOTTE
I don't know.

The BELLS are ringing.

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
Let's walk up to the convent.

Charlotte gets unsteadily to her feet. Kate grabs her hand

CUT TO:

EXT. BELL TOWER

Candlelight flickers in the Bell Tower. Charlotte and Kate are standing below looking up. Kate hiccups and topples backwards giggling.

CHARLOTTE
Shush.

Kate hiccups again.

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
Come on -- I'll show you the tower. You've never seen it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KATE
I'll fall off.

She hiccups.

CHARLOTTE
No -- you won't.

KATE
How are you going to get up there in those shoes?

CHARLOTTE
I'll manage.

She offers her hand.

KATE
No. I'm going to collect more rocks.

CHARLOTTE
Okay. Wait here. I'll be right back.

CUT TO:

INT. BELL TOWER - CHARLOTTE

lurching up the steps three at a time.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT GROUNDS - POND

Kate staggers toward the pond. Each time she sttempts to pick up a rock, she keels over and hiccups.

CUT TO:

INT. BELL TOWER

Joe is about to pick up his candle. He sees Charlotte standing breathlessly in the doorway. A moment. He blows out the candle. As soon as she reaches him they kiss. The passion pent up in both of them explodes. Their love-making is fast and frenzied. Charlotte clings to him as they climax.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Oh God -- this is real.
(scared)
... This is really real.

The moment is shattered by a loud SPLASH and piercing scream. They freeze.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTHER SUPERIOR'S COTTAGE

Mother Superior opens her cottage door and looks anxiously over the pond. She sees Kate floundering and shrieks for help. Another nun is already running from the convent.

MOTHER SUPERIOR
Joe. Joe. Quickly -- Joseph.
Come here.

CUT TO:

INT. BELL TOWER

Joe and Charlotte scramble for their clothes.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT POND

[illegible] surrounded by [illegible] one of the younger ones [illegible] in the murky water. A police car is crawling up the hill.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEAR THE POND

Joe and Charlotte run toward the commotion. Charlotte panics, throws her arms round a tree and vomits. Joe runs on.

CHARLOTTE
Jesus Christ. Please. Find my sister.

CUT TO:

AT THE POND

Kate is draped over the nun's arms. Pale and lifeless, patches of green shark paste still on her cheeks. General murmur among the nuns of -- "Is she breathing?" Mother Superior stares at Charlotte as she staggers nearer and kisses Kate's wet curls.

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
Please don't die, Kate. Oh, please don't die.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Charlotte is pushed aside by a POLICEMAN who snatches Kate away from the nun.

Landsky's car screeches to a halt beside the police car. He, Joe and Mrs. Flax get out.

REACTION SHOT - MRS. FLAX

as she sees Kate's limp body being carried towards them.

BACK TO SCENE

POLICEMAN
You the mother?

MRS. FLAX

POLICEMAN
Get in.

She does. Kate is handed to her. As the engine starts and the SIREN screams, Mrs. Flax sees Charlotte.

CLOSE ON CHARLOTTE

reacting to her mother's look.

BACK TO SCENE

Landsky jumps back into his car and follows the police car. Joe looks numbly at Charlotte and gently takes her arm.

JOE
Come on. I'll take you to the hospital.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL, WAITING ROOM

Joe and Charlotte look up at the clattering of stilettos. Mrs. Flax and Lou walk towards them. Mrs. Flax takes in the dress, the shoes, the dishevelled appearance and gets the picture. Charlotte stands -- terror on her face.

MRS. FLAX
How could she be drunk? What the hell was she doing up there?

CHARLOTTE
Is she going to be all right?

MRS. FLAX
They don't know!

Mrs. Flax raises her hand as if to strike. Charlotte raises her own to defend herself. Landsky intervenes.

LANDSKY
Joe -- take Charlotte home.
(to Charlotte)
There's nothing you can do here. We'll call when there's news.

CUT TO:

INT. JOE'S CAR

Joe is dropping Charlotte off at her house.

JOE
[illegible] to Florida [illegible]
probably be there a while.

Charlotte looks at him as if for the first time. She feels nothing.

CHARLOTTE
You look different.

JOE
I'll write you every week. We'll stay in touch. Okay?

She lightly touches his arm and gets out of the car.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

a) Charlotte scrubbing the make-up off.

b) Changing into her own clothes.

c) Washing dishes.

d) Making beds.

e) Vacuuming.

f) Sitting on the porch at dusk.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM

Kate is in an oxygen tent. Mrs. Flax sits by the bed.

MRS. FLAX
(a whisper)
Don't leave. Please don't leave.

A hand on her shoulder.

LANDSKY
I'm here.

He startles her. She meant Kate. She had forgotten he was there. But, registering his presence, is comforted by it.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX HOUSE - CHARLOTTE

sitting by the phone. It RINGS. She is too scared to pick it up.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL PAY PHONE - LANDSKY

He waits and waits. We HEAR Charlotte pick up.

LANDSKY
Charlotte?
(no reply)
She's going to be fine. They're keeping her one more night for observation. Your mother's on her way home to pick up some clothes.

He waits. Still no response.

CUT TO:

INT. FLAX HOUSE

Charlotte still clutches the phone. Tears of relief.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Mrs. Flax is getting out of a taxi. Charlotte is sitting on the porch steps. Her mother storms past and enters the house.

MRS. FLAX
If you're smart -- you'll stay out of my way.

Kate follows her into the house.

INT. FLAX HOUSE, KATE'S BEDROOM

Mrs. Flax enters, with Charlotte following.

MRS. FLAX
I mean it!

Mrs. Flax is throwing a change of clothes for Kate into an overnight bag. Charlotte hands her one of Kate's rocks and her "Fish Are Our Friends" book. Mrs. Flax hits her and then can't stop. Charlotte defends herself as best she can but lets her mother vent her rage.

MRS. FLAX
(screaming)
She could have died. She could have died. Why did you let her drink? What was she doing up there? What were you doing? Oh, yes! I know what you were doing. The whole town knows what you were doing.

Scared that she'll kill her, Mrs. Flax strides out, with Charlotte following.

INT. KITCHEN

Mrs. Flax slams the kettle on the stove.

MRS. FLAX
While I'm gone you can start packing up the rest of our things.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
No!

MRS. FLAX
This move's on you!

CHARLOTTE
I won't go.

MRS. FLAX
Where is loverboy, anyway?

CHARLOTTE
It's over. He's gone away.

MRS. FLAX
Oh, my. What a surprise.

CHARLOTTE
Stop it! It's not like that. I'm not like you!

MRS. FLAX
Tell that to the nuns. That was quite a show you gave them!

CHARLOTTE
Mom -- I'm not moving. I have to stay.

MRS. FLAX
What for? He's gone.

CHARLOTTE
For me. For me. I'm sick of running from one town to another every time you screw up and can't deal with it. Well -- this screw-up is all mine and I want to face it.

A beat. Mrs. Flax mechanically finishes making tea. She puts two cups on the table and sinks into a chair.

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
At least let me finish high school.

MRS. FLAX
(looking at Charlotte and seeing herself)
You're one year younger than I was when I had you. You've seen my life. You don't like it. Why'd you have to go out and make the same damn mistake?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE
Maybe I won't be pregnant.

MRS. FLAX
Make my day. Tell me you were careful.

Charlotte shakes her head. Mrs. Flax groans.

MRS. FLAX
(continuing)
How do you feel about this guy?

CHARLOTTE
I thought I loved him.

MRS. FLAX
Sounds familiar. Name that tune.

CHARLOTTE
I thought you were going to take him away.

That one really hits home.

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
Did you love Dad? What was he like?

MRS. FLAX
He had dark eyes and a cute smile.
[illegible]
He made me feel real special.
And then he was gone.

CHARLOTTE
What else? Tell me about him.

MRS. FLAX
There's nothing to tell. That's the whole story. He was a boy. Just a boy. And we made a mistake. Like you did!

CHARLOTTE
I wish I knew what he looked like.

MRS. FLAX
He looked like you. Only taller. I don't have any pictures. Some were taken at the wedding -- but they didn't come out right. I should have known then!
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX (cont'd)
He wasn't a bad person, Charlotte. He just couldn't deal with taking care of us. So -- I had to do it. Maybe I didn't do so good. I gave it my best shot.

Charlotte hugs her.

CHARLOTTE
We are going to stay, aren't we?

MRS. FLAX
Have you any idea how much talk there's going to be?

CHARLOTTE
There's always talk. It's just usually -- it's about you.

Mrs. Flax laughs.

CHARLOTTE
(continuing)
A year, Mom. Give it a year.

Mrs. Flax looks noncommittal.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - FLAX STATION WAGON

with luggage on the roof-rack, speeding along.

INT. STATION WAGON - CHARLOTTE AND KATE

asleep on the back seat.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Mrs. Flax promised she'd try and stay put. I know that was a hard one for her to keep.

CUT TO:

EXT. RED SOX TRAINING CAMP - LANDSKY

wearing a Red Sox hat and sitting happily in the bleachers. He is watching the bull-pen, where players are practicing pitching.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
All his life Lou had dreamed of making a Spring pilgrimage to the Red Sox Training Camp. This year he made it.

ANOTHER ANGLE

to reveal Mrs. Flax and Kate watching a different group doing calisthenics.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
(continuing)
And even got Mom and us to join him.

CAMERA ANGLES to show Charlotte, sporting a heavy tan, heading towards them with a batch of hot dogs.

MRS. FLAX
What took you so long?

CHARLOTTE
Well -- there was this nice young man and we got talking...

MRS. FLAX
(to Lou)
Why does that sound familiar?

LANDSKY

MRS. FLAX
Suddenly my daughter the nun has a comforting ring to it.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOARDWALK

Mrs. Flax glares at Lou as he flirts on the boardwalk with a young girl he is buying cotton candy from.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Mother and Lou have been getting along real well.

LANDSKY
(responding to look)
Hey... give me a break. I'm a nice old man.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. FLAX
(taking his arm)
Lou -- if I ever, ever catch you with any woman too young to have stretch marks -- you will become a seriously disabled person. Do I make myself clear?

LANDSKY
Crystal clear, honey. Does that mean you're planning to stick around?

MRS. FLAX
Don't get complacent. Lately, I miss living in a city. I get sick of Grove. Trees and all that weather!

LANDSKY
(unfazed)
Yep. Trees and weather can really get to a person.

CUT TO:

EXT. SCHOOL POOL

Kate is doing laps.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Kate's back to Olympic form. But since the accident -- sometimes her hearing gets fuzzy...

Kate climbs out of the pool and wraps herself in the towel Charlotte is holding.

KATE
I think I heard Mom say she might try making a main course tonight.

Charlotte looks fleetingly surprised.

KATE/CHARLOTTE
Nah!

CUT TO:

EXT. FLAX HOUSE

Charlotte checks the Flax mailbox as the school bus arrives. She gets on it reading a postcard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
I'm doing okay. Joe still writes me from Miami. Funny little cards with palm trees like his sister sent him. He's planning to open a greenhouse.

Mary O'Brien gets on the bus.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
(continuing)
I got quite a reputation for a while. Even Mary O'Brien was impressed. But I've decided to put "romance" on a back burner.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY

Charlotte is checking out a large pile of books.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
Instead I've been getting real interested in Greek myths. I'm reading about Icarus and his melting wings.

Charlotte smiles INTO CAMERA.

CHARLOTTE (V.O.)
(continuing)
[illegible]
out of hand.

FADE OUT.

THE END